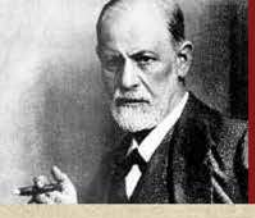

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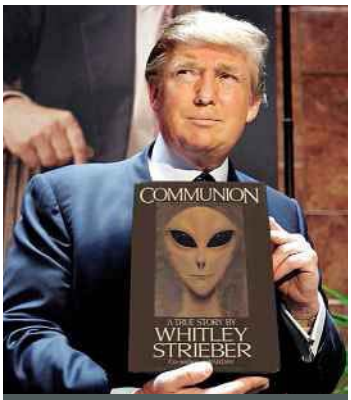

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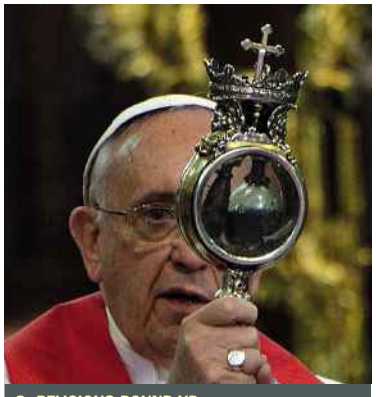

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editorial

Smells like teen spirits

WEIRD WHIFFS

A flick through some old copies of *FT* yields a wide variety of stories concerning anomalous smells: a couple driven from their home by mysterious fumes (**FT8:11**); the odour of sanctity surrounding an incorrupt corpse (**FT29:9**); a sulphurous cloud causing nosebleeds and sore throats (**FT53:14**); the nauseating niffs attributed to Virginia's maniacal gasser in the early 1930s (**FT131:32**); **or** an overpowering scent of maple syrup spreading across New York City (**FT205:21**). As well as constituting mysteries in their own right, these paranormal pongs also appear to accompany all kinds of other fortean phenomena, from alien encounters (Adamskian Space Brothers smell nice, sneaky Greys not so much) to sweet-smelling spectres and memorably malodorous Sasquatches. Smell might be a constant presence in forteana, but it's also an elusive one, notoriously unamenable to easy description or categorisation, impossible to capture as physical evidence, disappearing on the breeze and leaving only memories. It's a subject ripe for further exploration, so we're pleased to present a taster of Joshua Cutchin's new book *The Brimstone Deceit*, which attempts to do for supernatural scents what his earlier *A Trojan Feast* (see **FT332:42-47**) did for fortean foodstuffs. Turn to page 30 for an introductory sniff.

"Bewitching top notes of lily, rose and gardenia, with base notes of wet earth and putrefaction"

ORDER, ORDER!

Politics has been a subject hard to avoid in recent months, whether here in Europe or across the pond in the USA, and divisiveness has followed in its wake – even entering the hallowed halls of Fortean Towers. We'd just like to say that *FT* is not, and never has been a political organ of any persuasion; but we take weirdness where we find it, and – as usual, but more so – there's been no shortage of the stuff emanating from the world of politics.

What seems to have changed is that the sort of combative responses one finds below the line on newspaper websites have been finding their way onto fortean message boards and in a growing number of angry emails and furious letters denouncing *FT* for (variously): making digs at Donald Trump; not being nice about Vladimir Putin; publishing anti-Russian propaganda at the behest of our publishers; acting as useful idiots for the Western elites; having "some sort of lefty Social Justice Warrior/Guardianista" as editor; providing "a safe space for libtard snowflakes" and so on.

Forteans display as wide a range of political opinion as anyone else, and we allow our contributors complete freedom of expression in their work, certainly not "leaning on them"(as another correspondent suggested) to ensure that some imaginary *FT* party line is maintained. SD Tucker, self-confessed "grovelling capitalist lickspittle", is clear that his his ongoing Strange Statesmen series in these pages is meant to offer "comic explorations of weird things, ideas and events centring around politicians worldwide", not propaganda or political advice. The series has drawn praise from most readers, and angry responses from a few. Mr Tucker sums up his, and our, position perfectly in this month's letters pages: "Please don't read these articles thinking I'm telling you which side to back or vote for on any given issue… surely no one reads *FT* looking to find serious political guidance?"

ERRATA

FT347:39+41: In Paul Sieveking's extensive summary of creepy clown sightings, he inadvertently quoted a passage from Benjamin Radford's latest book *Bad Clowns* without acknowledgement. We'd like to apologise to Ben for this inadvertent plagiarism: the problem arose because news reports used in Paul's summary themselves made extensive use of Ben's excellent book (see our review, **FT349:61**). For more from Mr Radford, turn to this issue's Forum section for a little known fortean episode in the life of a celebrated American explorer.

FT348:24: Martin Jenkins of London pointed out that the magazine cover shown here is certainly not French, as described in the caption. "If you look carefully it says, 'Raport UFO Romania', and then helpfully translates this as 'Romanian UFO Report'. So, presumably Romanian, not French."

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

LISTEN

IT JUST MIGHT CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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strangedays

Our Lady of Holy Death

The skeletal saint whose cult is spreading across Mexico and beyond

LUIS ACOSTA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Devotees pray at the saint's shrine in the Iztapalapa shantytown, Mexico City.

The cult of *Nuestra Senora de la Santa Muerte* (Our Lady of Holy Death) is probably the fastest growing religion in the Americas. Holding a scythe in one hand and a globe in the other, Santa Muerte could easily be mistaken for the Grim Reaper; but millions believe the smiling skeletal saint – affectionately nicknamed *la Flaquita* (the Skinny Lady), or *la Madrina* (the Godmother) – can heal illness, bring prosperity and even help find love, but the most common plea is for a peaceful death and safe delivery to the afterlife. She is depicted as a grinning skeleton swathed in a hooded cloak, often made of red velvet, embroidered lace or black sheeting. Objects associated with her image include scales (for justice), an hourglass (mortality), an owl (wisdom), and an oil lamp (lighting the way).

"From Chile to Canada, Santa Muerte has no rival in terms of the rapidity and scope of its expansion," said Andrew Chesnut, Professor of Religious Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and author of *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint*. "In 2001 when devotion to the folk religion first went public in Mexico, Saint Death was unknown to 99 per cent of Mexicans. In just 15 years she has attracted an estimated 10 to 12 million devotees, primarily in Mexico, Central America, and the US." There are also followers in the UK, Australia, and Japan.

Historians say the Santa Muerte cult has its roots in the Aztec worship of Mictecacihuatl ("Lady of the Dead"), but its modern iteration incorporates many of the rituals of the Catholic Church. Worship was initially clandestine, the prayers and rites quietly uttered at domestic altars. Her cult was documented in working class neighbourhoods in Argentina and Mexico City in the 1940s, and in the Mexican state of Hidalgo in the 1960s. It went public in 2001, when Enriqueta Romero founded a shrine to the saint in her Mexico City suburb of Tepito, after which Santa Muerte became mainstream. Sacrificial Masses are held at the Tepito shrine on the first day of each month, when pigeons and farm animals are slaughtered on the altar. Worshippers believe their offerings of fruit, tequila and cigarettes bring them protection. Romero is often regarded as the cult's 'high priestess'.

More forgiving than the Catholic Church – she is said not to punish traditional sins – Santa Muerte grew popular in Mexico's prisons and became the patron saint of drug cartels. In 'prisoner Masses', families of inmates pray to Santa Muerte to unlock their cells. The cartels' mass beheadings and lynchings might be ritual offerings to Santa Muerte rather than simply warnings to rival gangs. The Mexican government briefly tried to suppress the cult, with the army demolishing some 40 roadside shrines close to the US border in 2009. But by 2013, the Santa Muerte had come to rival the Virgin of Guadalupe, the country's "national patroness" in popularity. Today, statues of both are often sold side by side in shops.

In May 2013, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture, said worshipping Santa Muerte was "anti-religious", adding: "Religion celebrates life, but here you have death. It's not religion just because it's dressed up like religion; it's a blasphemy against religion." During his trip to Mexico in 2016, Pope Francis included a cryptic admonishment of Santa Muerte in an address to Mexican bishops, saying he was "particularly concerned about those many persons who, seduced by the empty power of the world, praise illusions and embrace their macabre symbols to commemorate death in exchange for money."

However, many devout Catholics see no contradiction in embracing the cult. For instance, Amalia Cordero, 55, spoke of it with the passion of a born-again Christian coming to Jesus. She had "complete faith" from the moment she first laid eyes on a lit figurine of the "Beautiful Lady" on the side of a road; and while she's been Catholic all her life, she never truly felt God until finding Santa Muerte. Defending the saint's association with narcos, she said: "Santa Muerte herself isn't bad. We make her bad. We make her do those things. She's an angel God created and each person can ask what they want of her. It's sad when people use her for evil."

A rival patron saint for Mexican drug traffickers is Jesús Malverde of Sinaloa, known as the "Angel of the Poor" or *El Narcoanton* (the Big Narco Saint). He was a common criminal, though not a drug trafficker. Soon after he was hanged in 1909, locals began attributing miracles to him. They made plaster busts of his likeness and built a shrine of rough-hewn wooden planks in Culiacan, capital of the Pacific coastal state of Sinaloa. In the early 1990s some of Mexico's most powerful drug traffickers joined locals in paying homage at his shrine, leaving bullets and dollar bills. Meanwhile in Venezuela, gangsters of the Maria Lionza cult leave offerings to Ismael and his Holy Thugs (*Santos Malandros*); see **FT317:53-54** for more. *Rocky Mountain News, 4 Sept 1995; [R] 4 Mar; Houston (TX) Chronicle, 25 Aug 2005; Lorado (WV) Morning Times, 29 July 2007; BBC News, 9 May 2013; Sun, 15 Dec 2014; Catholic Herald magazine, 6 Nov 2015; businessinsider.com, 17 Mar; D.Telegraph, 25 Dec 2016.*

THE PROPHET OF DOOM
Pesticide-spraying preacher, and other recent religious oddities
PAGE 8

ANOTHER DOG IN THE WALL
Russian pup rescued after three-year immurement
PAGE 10

CASH IN THE ATTIC
Lost Leonardo and further surprising art world finds
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The Conspirasphere

Mind-controlled Pentagon killer, Russian hackers, and Nibiru spotters: NOEL ROONEY considers three tall tales that have surfaced in the mainstream media.

As I'm writing this column, the news is running with the story of a mass shooting at the Fort Lauderdale Airport in Florida, USA. The perpetrator, a 26-year-old army veteran, took a gun out of his luggage in the baggage claim area and started shooting. By the time he had run out of ammunition, and lay down, a passive pentagram, to await arrest, five people were dead and dozens wounded. The media are now suggesting that the young man, when arrested, claimed that the Pentagon was controlling his mind; in particular it was forcing him to watch Islamic State videos. A small reminder that the Conspirasphere is not always and only an arena for sceptical entertainment, perhaps; or further proof, if more proof were needed, that the Conspiracy is real.

Further proof is a theme much loved by the adherents of the 'Nibiru is Coming' school of eschatology. You can dismiss them easily enough, on the (to me incontrovertible) grounds that the late Zechariah Sitchin got it all wrong; but plenty of perfectly respectable religious groups and institutions were founded on similarly fallacious grounds, and we don't (all) treat them as space fairies. This year, there are already a couple of celestial candidates heaving into view, and it seems that elements of the mainstream media have seen them too; further proof that what was once the province of the marginal, the maverick and the mad is now the stuff of news.

At the very least, you have to admire the fortitude of the Nibiru spotters. To scan the skies, and analyse the output of various establishment space agencies for anomalies, all in a quest to demonstrate finally that *this* is the year it all happens; and then to do it again, year after year, takes a kind of energy that is usually reserved to the most apocalyptic of churches. And the faithful are not helped by history; Sitchin's suggestion (I know, but that's where it started) was a 3,600-year orbit, which means the last time the Annunaki came to visit was somewhere around 1,600 BC. Competent astronomers operated in that period and they seem to have missed what modern organs such as the *Daily Mail* (not universally recognised for its coterie of boffins) did not. It's tough out there.

Meanwhile, the much-touted efforts of Russian hackers will have paid off by the time you read this, and the Donald (a man recently compared, a tad unfairly, to Hitler by his defeated opponent) will be in charge. Isn't it strange that, when some cove in a tin-foil hat claims the Annunaki are coming to get us, we just giggle and ask where the evidence is, but when an entire layer of the US political class makes up a fairy story about Russia manipulating the US election process, the only people asking for concrete evidence are the same blokes in tin foil hats? Post-modernity ('disappointment raised to the level of high culture') is sometimes just a little too good at irony for its own (and our) good.

The gradual shift of the Conspirasphere into the mainstream is both an additional layer of irony, and an irony in itself; in the post-truth world, para-truth is an essential element of our media landscape, and makes that landscape both more and less believable. It makes the world funnier, of course (though I don't think Mr Fort would be laughing); but if you ask those victims of a troubled man claiming the Pentagon colonised his brain and made him shoot, I suspect the word 'tragedy' would be the operative term.

http://www.sltrib.com/home/4789389-155/veteran-who-said-the-government-was;

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-4096940/Report-election-hacking-says-Russia-plans-more.html;

http://www.thetruthseeker.co.uk/?p=145100;

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3292170/Is-alien-probe-Strange-object-set-sweep-past-Earth-2017-just-space-junk-Apollo-12-mission.html

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Canadians keen on upsetting Italy

Toronto Star, 24 Sept 2015.

Man with 50 dead cats on ice gets 18 months for child porn

Palm Beach (FL) Post, 5 Oct 2015.

Feral pig caught eating cannabis refuses to give up his stash

D.Telegraph, 14 Oct 2015

Jehovah's witness has battled with demons after sex activity with child

Stratford Observer, 16 Oct 2015.

DOZENS OF WITNESSES SEE ANTICHRIST HOVERING OVER LOS ANGELES

Metro, via Irish Independent, 29 Aug 2015.

Dead whale may explode off Fukuoka

Asahi Shimbun (Japan), 29 Sept 2015.

SIDELINES...

FLORIDA MONSTER

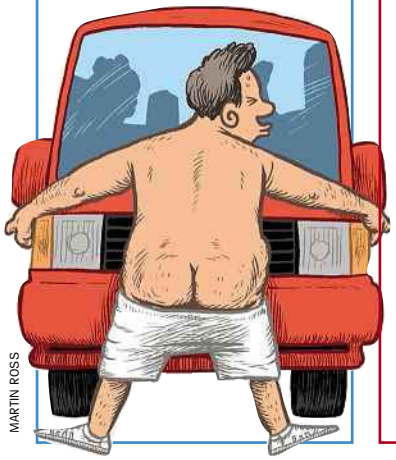
Steven Smith, 31, was fishing with his cousin off New Smyrna Beach in Florida when they allegedly encountered a sea serpent. Smith described it as a "jet black" plesiosaurus "three to four feet tall" with "bloodshot round eyes", an S-shaped long and stocky neck, thick tail and flippers. The sighting only lasted about three seconds. *cryptozoology-news.com, 13 Nov 2016.*

BIRTHDAY CLUSTERS

A baby born on 5 August is the fourth in his family – from Brecon, Mid-Wales – to be born on that date, joining grandfather David Jones, 53, father Ashley, 27, and uncle Adam, 25. Ashley had a twin, but he died aged six months in 1992. On 1 August, Libbie Ballingal was born in Evesham, Worcestershire. Her parents, Jodie and Mark, were also both born on 1 August. *D.Express, 8 Aug; D.Mirror online, 9 Aug 2016.*

AUTO-EROTIC

On 16 August, a man was observed attempting to have sex with the front grill of a red van parked in Dayton, Ohio. The man subsequently "lay down and possibly passed out" before rising and walking in circles. Police came upon Michael Henson, 35, who "appeared under the influence of some type of narcotic" and was wearing only gym shorts and shoes. He was arrested for public indecency. *the smokinggun.com, 18 Aug 2016.*



MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG

Extra fingers and heads, earfuls of insects and the longest ever human tail

COVER ASIA PRESS

ABOVE: Krishna Choudhary, from Bihar, and some of his family, 25 members of which have 12 fingers and 12 toes.

PRODIGIOUS DIGITS

Krishna Choudhary, 50, who lives in a small village in Bihar, northern India, has six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot – just like his father and siblings. In fact, 25 members of his family each have 12 fingers and 12 toes. "I don't have any problems with my extra fingers, but my children and grandchildren suffer a lot," said Krishna, 50, a daily wage labourer. "I've had boys that have refused to marry the girls of my family after learning of their condition. Four people rejected my daughter after finding out she had 24 digits." He said it was difficult for him and his children to find footwear that was comfortable, and they were obliged to wear flip-flops. Krishna's sister-in-law Sitbiya Choudhary considers the condition a blessing, while other members of the family feel they have been cursed. *dailymail.co.uk, 18 Nov 2016.*

• Hong Hong, a Chinese boy, was born in January 2016 in Pingjiang County, Hunan province, with 15 fingers, 16 toes, two palms on each hand and no thumbs. The boy's mother also has polydactylism, with six fingers and toes. Polydactyly is fairly common, affecting about one in every 1,000 live births, according to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Often, the extra digits are removed surgically, and last May Hong Hong's parents, who live in the city of Shenzhen, were trying to raise enough money to reduce their son's digits – requiring as much as 200,000 Chinese yuan (about £24,000) – although he would have to be a bit older, according to his father, Zou Chenglin. Doctors have given the family differing advice, with some saying the surgery is much more complicated than originally thought because Hong Hong requires not only the removal of his extra fingers and toes but also needs reconstructed thumbs. Opposable thumbs are essential because they give people the ability to grasp objects. *[CNN] 5 May 2016.*

> **"I don't have any problems with my extra fingers"**

TWO IN ONE

A two-headed baby boy, weighing 2.5kg (5lb 7oz), was born on 3 October 2016 at Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College in Ajmer, Rajasthan, northern India. He was said to be in a "healthy state" but had "severe breathing issues". Against medical advice, he was taken home by his parents, but sadly died 32 hours after birth. Dr Jaiprakash Narayan admitted the boy was actually conjoined twins, but separation was thought to be "nearly impossible": despite the twins having two pairs of all of the internal organs, they were all in one body, with only one pair of arms and legs. *dailymail.co.uk, 5 Oct; mysteriousuniverse.org, 10 Oct 2016.*

TAIL REMOVED

An 18-year-old boy from Nagpur in the Indian state of Maharashtra with a 20cm 'tail' growing at the bottom of his spine has undergone

surgery to have it removed. It started to appear on his back just after his 14th birthday. He and his family had kept it a secret because they were worried he would be bullied, but finally sought medical help after it grew too long to hide – and had begun to develop a bone inside. "It became a problem when the tail grew outside the body," said his mother, who declined to be named. "He would just lift the tail every time he needed to change his clothes. I could see that it was very annoying and painful for him, so I took him to a hospital." It's thought to be the longest ever recorded on a human – although cases are very rare [see **FT52:52-54**]. Although surgically removing a tail isn't a very complicated procedure, it must be carried out by a neurosurgeon as the growth of tail involves a part of the spinal cord. It normally develops when the end of the spine is flattened in some way. *BBC News, 7 Oct 2016.*

INSECT STOWAWAYS

In August 2016, a 12-year-old Indian girl called Shreya Darji, from Deesa, Gujarat, complained of ringing in her ears. At the local hospital, doctors removed some dead ants from her ear canal and thought that was the end of the problem, but she was still discovering around a dozen ants a day crawling out of her ears. Following various trips to the hospital and the removal of over 1,000 ants, experts were baffled. Both MRI and CT scans came back normal. Doctors tried flushing her ears with antiseptic to drown the ants, and attempted several times to locate the queen ant with laparoscopic cameras and kill her. Dr Jawahar Talsania, the leading ear, nose and throat surgeon at the hospital in Gujarat, also used an endoscopic camera to look inside the girl's ear canal; apart from finding dead ants, her organs were all unharmed. The family even consulted witchdoctors, but they were unable to help. It was a mystery how the ants got into her ears in the first place. "I'm worried about her future and how this will affect her studies," said her father, Sanjay Darji. "Other children in her school and community are teasing her." *Medical Daily, 11 Feb; ripleys.com/blog, 13 Feb; D.Express online, 25 Nov 2016.*

CATERS NEWS

COVER ASIA PRESS

TOP: The 18-year-old boy from the Indian State of Maharashta with a 20cm-tail.
ABOVE: This two-headed boy was born in Rajasthan, but sadly died 32 hours later.

• Victoria Price, 42, from Porthcawl in South Wales complained of earache and her husband Huw spotted a live creature lurking in her ear canal. She went to the Princess of Wales hospital in Bridgend, where nurse Sarah Gaze removed a large furry spider from her inner ear. Price, a lifeguard who swims in the sea at Newton Beach several times a week, thought the spider might have been in her hoodie as she was getting changed in a beach hut one evening and lurked in her hair when she got home. "When I went into the shower the first thing it wanted to do was find somewhere warm and dry, so it went into my ear," Price explained. "I think the pain must have been him dancing on my eardrum." The intruder did not appear to have caused any lasting damage. Neither did it lay any eggs, as Price said she had been repeatedly asked. *theguardian.com, 9 June; Western Mail, 10 June 2016.*

SIDELINES...

LEG RETRIEVED

Elliot Fuller and Jason Franklin spotted a prosthetic leg sticking out of a beaver dam while paddling between a pair of lakes near Wabeno, Wisconsin, on 4 August. A search on Craigslist yielded an ad from Mark Warner, 49, who lost the limb when his own canoe tipped over during a July fishing trip on Range Line Lake in Wabeno, three miles from the beaver dam. The canoeists returned it to Warner, netting a $50 reward. *[AP] 8 Aug 2016.*

AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES

According to the Spiritual Science Research Foundation (founded by Indian hypnotherapist Jayant Balaji Athavale), 85 per cent of homosexuals are not gay – just possessed by ghosts of the opposite sex. The Foundation also claims that "hormonal changes" explain the behaviour of five per cent of homosexuals. *D.Star, 10 Dec 2016.* See Ghostwatch, p16-18 for more.

NOT A COUNTRY

Kiwi tourist Chloe Phillips-Harris, 28, was detained at Almaty Airport, Kazakhstan, after immigration officials refused to believe that New Zealand was a country and not part of Australia. She was held two days and interrogated for hours. A map in the room did not show New Zealand, making it tougher to persuade the guards that her country existed. She was eventually able to enter after contacts helped her to secure a new visa and a US passport (as she has dual nationality). *telegraph.co.uk, dailymail.co.uk, 5 Dec 2016.*

DESPERATE MEASURE

Lawrence Ripple, 70, passed a note to a bank teller in Kansas City, Kansas, demanding cash and warning he had a gun. He was given $3,000, and sat in the lobby, telling a security guard: "I'm the guy you're looking for." When the police arrived, Ripple told them that he would rather go to jail than live with his wife. *D.Mail, 10 Sept 2016.*

SIDELINES...

AVIAN PORTENT

Thousands of birds were detected on Doppler radar taking flight from Oklahoma City about 6:47am, 16 minutes before a 5.6 magnitude earthquake struck near Pawnee, Oklahoma, (about 93 miles/150km northeast of Oklahoma City) at 7:03am on 3 September 2016. The US Geological Survey states that the earliest record of animals fleeing before an earthquake is from Greece in 373 BC, when rats, weasels, snakes, and centipedes reportedly headed for safety several days before a destructive quake. *Strange Sounds, 7 Sept 2016.*

HEMINGWAY CLONE

For the first time in its 36-year history, the Hemingway look-a-like contest in the Florida Keys – with 140 contestants in 2016 – was won by someone called Hemingway. Dave Hemingway, 65, from North Carolina, insisted he was not related to the Nobel Prize-winning author. *telegraph.co.uk, 25 July 2016.*

SERPENT IN THE TREE

On 18 December, a woman identified as Cheryl from the Melbourne suburb of Frankston discovered a venomous, metre-long tiger snake entwined with the tinsel on her Christmas tree. It was collected by snake catcher Barry Goldsmith and relocated to a friend's bush property nearby. *abc.net.au, 19 Dec; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 20 Dec 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

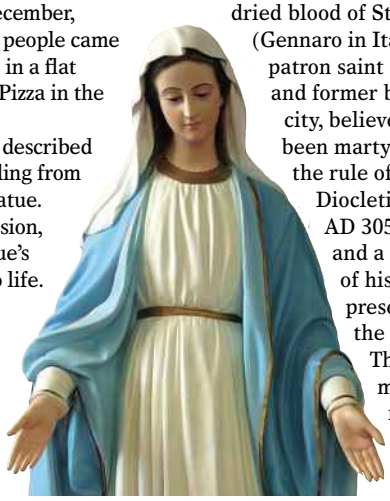
RELIGIOUS NEWS

LACHRYMOSE LADY, BLOODY BAD OMEN AND A PECKER-PICKING PREACHER

MOTHER MARY WEEP FOR US

December saw reports of a weeping Virgin Mary in Ireland's County Kerry. Seven years ago the slightly damaged statue was destined for the skip as it was missing several fingers, but self-professed spiritual healer Tom Powers, 73, rescued it from a convent. Mr Powers, who claims to hear God's voice, insists the statue has turned "miraculous". He said the white paper flowers laid at the feet of the statue have changed to a gold tint to match the statue's dress. During December, several hundred people came to see the statue in a flat above Domino's Pizza in the centre of Tralee.

Teresa Roche described seeing a tear falling from the eye of the statue. On another occasion, she saw the statue's features come to life. "I could see the real features in her face. She was young and her skin was so soft. You get the same kind of feeling in Lourdes. I've been there 20 times." Locals are adamant they have seen the statue move her hands and change colour. Some have witnessed a prominent blue vein standing out in her neck. *sundayworld.com, 10 Dec 2016.*



OMINOUS PORTENT

An ancient ampoule of blood failed to liquefy on 16 December, a bad omen for 2017, thought to portend war, famine, disease or other disaster. One of the most famous recurring miracles is the liquefaction of the dried blood of St Januarius (Gennaro in Italian), patron saint of Naples and former bishop of the city, believed to have been martyred during the rule of Emperor Diocletian around AD 305. His bones and a reliquary of his blood are preserved in the cathedral. The reputed miracle, first recorded in 1389, is locally known and accepted, but not officially recognised by the Church. The liquefaction is believed to happen at least three times a year: on the Saturday before the first Sunday of May (commemorating the reunification of the saint's relics); on the saint's feast day, 19 September; and on 16 December, the day Mount Vesuvius erupted in 1631. During the miracle, the dried, red-coloured mass confined to one side of the reliquary becomes blood that covers the entire glass. The announcement of the liquefaction is greeted with a 21-gun salute at the 13th-century Castel Nuovo. The December failure to liquefy was the first since 19 September 1980, which allegedly portended the Irpinia earthquake on 23 November that year.

On 21 March 2015, Pope Francis met with priests and seminarians at the cathedral and gave a blessing with the relic. Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe of Naples then received an ampoule back from the Pope and, noting that some of the blood was still solid, remarked: "It seems that St Januarius

ALBERTO PIZZOLI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Ireland's latest miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary. **ABOVE:** Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe, archbishop of Naples shows the ampoule containing the blood of Saint Januarius to Pope Francis during a visit in March 2015.

loves the Pope, because the blood is already half liquefied." Pope Francis quipped in response: "You can see that the saint only loves us a little. We have to convert more."

The last time the blood liquefied in the presence of a Pope was in 1848 when Pius IX visited. It didn't happen when St John Paul II visited the city in October 1979, or when Benedict XVI visited in October 2007. The relic failed to liquefy in September 1939 when World War II broke out and during a cholera outbreak in Naples in 1973. However, Monsignor Vincenzo De Gregorio, the Abbot of the Chapel of the Treasure of San Gennaro, took a philosophical view. "We must not think of disasters and calamities," he counselled. "We are men of faith and we must pray."

Sceptics have asserted that the supposed blood is a thixotropic gel, one that is relatively solid but liquefies when stirred or agitated; this remains unproven as the Church forbids the ancient seals on the two phials to be broken. "To presume that it must be a sleight-of-hand trick simply because the effect can be replicated by stage magicians is rash, unfair, and flies in the face of sound eye-witness testimony," wrote Bob Rickard (*'Seeing Red: the Blood Miracles of Naples'*, **FT65:36-41**). "If a 'mediæval' hoaxer created the trick back in he 14th century… how has the substance kept its vigour up to the present through so many liquefactions or performed so successfully under such a variety of conditions? As Alban Butler exclaimed: 'The chemical secret would be not only a notorious fraud but also a wonderful discovery'."

The last word should go to the Jesuit Father Herbert Thurston: "The inability to explain such things does not force us to the alternative of either denying the facts or declaring them to be miraculous." *Catholic News Agency, 19 Dec; The Week, 20 Dec 2016. See* also **FT16:5, 51:23, 52:4, 82:48, 117:8**.

TOP: Lethebo Rabalago – let us spray. **BELOW**: Bishop Daniel Obinim.

The prophet claims the pesticide can heal cancer

PROPHET OF DOOM

Lethebo Rabalago, a South African prophet who runs the Mountzion General Assembly in Limpopo province, claims a pesticide called Doom can heal people. In photos circulating on Facebook and Twitter, Rabalago is seen spraying the insecticide directly into the eyes and various body parts of his congregants. He said he had sprayed the face of one woman because she had an eye infection and claimed the woman was "just fine because she believed in the power of God". He also claims the spray can heal cancer and HIV. Tiger Brands, the company that produces Doom, warned of the risks of spraying the substance, saying the practice was "alarming", while a government commission urged anyone effected to lodge complaints. In another incident, a pastor convinced members of his church to eat snakes and grass, and drink fuel for healing. *BBC News, 21 Nov 2016.*

HANDS-ON PREACHER

Bishop Daniel Obinim, who founded the International God's Way Church in the Ashanti region of Ghana, claims to make men's penises larger by massaging them with his hands. He has been filmed performing a ritual where he moves around a room full of men, grabbing them each by the crotch. In some cases, he will keep hold of their penises and give them a little shake. Graciously, he also offers to massage women's breasts in order to enlarge them too.

In a scene broadcast on his own channel, Obinim TV, the bishop says: "If you do not like the looks of any part of your body, come to me. What do you want that I can't offer? If you want big buttocks I can do it for you. If you want big breasts, I can help. If you have a small manhood, I can change them all when I come to the spiritual realm." Bishop Obinim has been criticised for his controversial practices before. In August he was filmed whipping teenagers while accusing them of being sexually promiscuous. He is now facing charges over the incident. *Metro, 6 Dec 2016.*

SIDELINES...

RUST IN PEACE

A 73-year-old man drove his Audi into a pit filled with 12,000 litres of Coca-Cola in Sheder, Latvia, hoping to get rid of its rust. However, the £7,000 test was ruined when he drove the car too fast and hit the opposite side of the pit. *Metro, 1 Nov 2016.*

FAUX ZEBRA

Someone broke into a stable in the Czech village of Stary Hrozenkov and spray-painted a seven-year-old black stallion with white stripes to make it look like a zebra – as well as snipping its tail. If caught, the prankster faces up to three years in jail. *Metro, 3 Oct 2016.*

DAIRY ATTACKS

Alison Nurton, founder of a haberdashery business in Sherborne, Dorset, was arriving at her new premises on Cheap Street to teach a crochet workshop at around 7pm on 20 January 2016 when a yoghurt was thrown at her and the entrance to the shop by someone driving by in a convertible. The report in the *North Devon Journal* (16 Sept 2016) said it was one of two "drive-by dairy attacks".

BORING FOR ENGLAND

Mark Leigh, 48, from Long Ditton in Surrey, has arguably Britain's most boring hobby: taking photos of lost gloves. In three years he has amassed more than 300. He was introduced to the Dull Men's Club by fellow member Hugh Barker, a box hedge enthusiast, and was named Mr November in the club's calendar. *Metro, 24 Nov 2016.*

SPOOKED RESIDENTS

According to a survey conducted by Towergate Insurance, nearly 10 per cent of Britons have moved because they thought their house might be haunted, and nearly two-thirds of buyers will not contemplate a property near a graveyard or a spooky-looking church. However, nearly a third would buy a 'haunted' house if the seller dropped the price by 20 per cent. *Mail on Sunday, 30 Oct 2016.*

Another brick in the wall...

A mysterious voice, a canine prisoner freed, and a surprise immurement

For three days last December, tenants of a building in the Oduduwa Area of Ondo State in Nigeria were troubled by a mystery voice seemingly coming from a wall. Many of them believed that the house was haunted, and actually considered moving. Eventually, they alerted the police since the owner of the property was unreachable. With the help of neighbours and passersby, the wall was broken down on 9 December to reveal an emaciated 16-year-old boy called Aduragbemi, who had been trapped between two walls a mere 10 inches (25cm) apart. One of the residents who identified herself simply as Becky said: "We never knew anyone was there, so when the noise refused to stop and was unbearable, I told my friends to start looking for accommodation for me because it was becoming scary hearing a strange voice coming out of a wall for three days, non-stop... Could it be a ghost? I asked myself. Initially, we laughed when the person was talking incoherently, because he was fond of repeating anything people around said.

"We, in our compound, thought the voice was from the shops on the other side, so we confronted them to know who was doing it, but they said they thought it was from our compound... That was when we sensed trouble. We also realised that in the night when the shops had closed, the voice persisted and the person was saying meaningless things, like 'My name is Judas Iscariot; I'm Jesus; I was the one who killed Jesus, bring your gaari [cassava flakes], etc'. It became unbearable and I couldn't wait to run away. We thought we were being haunted by some ghosts." Becky recalled how they had been unable to sleep at night and ended up sitting outside. "It was scary to remain indoors, with the kind of things he was saying at that time of night, so sometimes we all came out to sit down outside; it felt safer."

Aduragbemi was taken to the local police station before his mother arrived at the scene and was directed there as well. "We learnt the boy had mental issues because people who knew him confirmed that he was fond of going to hide and doing strange things," said Becky, adding that one of their neighbours claimed to have seen the naked boy running towards their compound at about 11pm on 7 December. Although how the boy had got into the wall was unexplained, it was thought that he had climbed their fence and fallen into the wall cavity. According to *Saturday Punch*, Aduragbemi was "an Indian hemp smoker" and had been undergoing treatment for mental illness for three years. *pulse.ng (Nigeria), 17 Dec 2016.*

ABOVE: Volya emerges at long last.

Her howling was heartbreaking, especially in the winter months

• Aduragbemi was lucky he was trapped for only three days; a dog was trapped in a hole between a shop and a nine-storey apartment block *for three years* in the town of Khabarovsk in eastern Russia's Khabarovsk Krai region. She was cruelly thrown in as a puppy and came to be known locally as the prisoner of Chateau d'If, after the fortress jail in the Bay of Marseille. The nervous animal would not let anyone get close enough to rescue her from the cramped and dark cavity and eventually she grew too big to get out on her own. She would poke her nose out of the hole and people had long tried to lure her out into the open, but she always backed away when anyone came near. Residents would leave food for her every day, saying that her howling, particularly in the winter months, was heartbreaking. The authorities refused to help, but eventually a public campaign and media exposure managed to secure the dog's release last October. Animal rights activists and local people considered smashing through the wall but were worried the dog could be hurt or even killed. Welder Andrey Chernov tried to widen the feeding hole, but the dog refused to come out.

Karina Dombrovskaya said: "We studied the structure of the basement, and looked for options. The dog was not just sitting in the opening; she had a narrow area under the basement of the shop. Naturally, over the years, she had dug some passages and could move there." Eventually they found Darya Stepantsova, 27, who was slim enough to squeeze through the narrow hole. "I thought I could just get inside, throw a loop round the dog's neck and pull her out," she said. "But when I got there, I was shocked. For years the dog had dug tunnels there. I was scared, it was difficult. There was no space for a person under the basement and I had to dig trenches with my bare hands. I was breathing only cement dust and sand. I crawled closer to the dog, threw a loop over her head, and tied her muzzle with a bandage. At one point I got into a dead end and thought that I'd never get out. I pulled myself together and pulled out the dog." The animal was given a new name – Volya – meaning 'Freedom'. She was checked over by vets and found to be in good health. At the time of the report, she was living in a temporary shelter and getting acclimatised to life above ground. She was scared of people, open spaces and light, and continually tried to find an enclosed space to hide. *D.Express (online), 11 Oct; Metro, 12 Oct 2016.*

• A man in central Germany tried to leave his house by the front door on 2 January, only to find a brick wall there. Unidentified perpetrators in Mainhausen, near Offenbach, had bricked it up during the night. The police said the wall could have been built within minutes. The motive was unclear – possibly a joke, an act of revenge, or a bet. Police were searching for "several people". The damage to the property was estimated at £425. *BBC News, 3 Jan 2017.*

MAN AND BEAST

Vijay Parsana, 44, takes a selfie with his two-year-old cow Poonam, on the eve of her marriage in Ghuma village, near Ahmedabad, India. Parsana was marrying Poonam off to an ox named Arjun from Bagdana village, 155 miles (250km) from Ahmedabad, on 24 March 2016 in an elaborate ceremony that aimed to highlight the revered status enjoyed by cows in Hindu-majority India. PHOTO: SAM PANTHAKY/AFP/ GETTY IMAGES.

12-year-old Chiquinho the cat goes everywhere with his owner, Alexandre Goulart, accompanying him to church, on shopping trips and for walks on the beach. It's Chiquinho's motorcycle jaunts, though, that have made the shades-sporting cool cat something of a local celebrity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Father-of-four Goulart explains: "I've looked for a meaning in life without Chiquinho, and not found it. He is the love of my life. I ask God to give many years of life to him." For an earlier motorcycling moggy, see **FT85:5**. *D.Telegraph, 20 June 2016*. PHOTO: YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES.

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on recent finds, including a newly discovered Çatalhöyük 'Venus', a fourth-century Roman coin unearthed in Japan and bits of bitumen linking Suffolk's Sutton Hoo with ancient Syria.

NEOLITHIC VENUS

A striking female figurine has been unearthed at the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in central Anatolia, Turkey. The marmoreal stone statuette, 17cm (6.7in) long and weighing one kilo (2.2lb), dates back to about 8,000-5,500 BC and is considered unique due to its intact form and fine craftsmanship. It is of course much more recent than the so-called Venus of Willendorf in Austria, found in 1908 and thought to have been made between 28,000 and 25,000 BC, and many similar figurines found across Eurasia.

LEFT: The female figurine found at Çatalhöyük. **BELOW**: Plotting the Sutton Hoo ship's rivets in three dimensions, and another view of the ship, with a section of plaster cast in the centre, July 1967. **FACING PAGE**: A fourth-century Roman copper coin unearthed on Okinawa.

SUTTON HOO: THE SYRIAN CONNECTION

The Saxon ship burial at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk – probably the grave of King Rædwald of the Wuffing dynasty, who ruled around AD 617-625 – was hurriedly excavated in 1939 before the outbreak of WWII. I helped re-excavate the ship over three summer seasons (1965-67), under the direction of Rupert Bruce-Mitford of the British Museum. We gradually revealed the ghostly leaf-shaped vessel, 89ft (27m) long, its timbers reduced to a layer of darkened sand studded with hundreds of rust-bloated iron rivets. We plotted each rivet in three dimensions and made a plaster cast of the ship, enabling the construction of a polyester resin replica reinforced with fibreglass matting and paper rope. One day I unearthed some caulking, which I was told was the earliest ever found. Caulking is oakum (tarred rope) stuffed between the ship's timbers for waterproofing. The spectacular grave goods were surprising, considering this was the so-called "Dark Ages". Besides the astounding gold and garnet jewellery made by local craftsmen, the objects came from all over the place: a whetstone from Sweden, Merovingian coins from France, and silver artefacts from Italy, Eastern Europe, Byzantium and Egypt demonstrated a far-reaching trade network.

Black organic fragments were found at the head and foot of where the king's body had been before it was dissolved in the acidic soil. These were believed to be English pine tar used for boat maintenance – but recent analysis has shown the petrochemical scraps (pitch or bitumen) should be viewed as "exotic grave goods". The discovery was made when the fragments were included in an EU-funded research project studying the preservation of tars associated with ancient boats. The fossils within "show this material comes from the Dead Sea family of bitumens, perhaps sourced in Syria", according to Stephen Bowden, from the University of Aberdeen. Bitumen is a viscous or semi-solid oil deposit, also known as asphalt. Pauline Burger of the British Museum, who made the chemical analysis, said: "Archæological finds of bitumen from this and earlier periods in Britain are extremely rare, despite the abundance of natural sources of bitumen in Great Britain," adding that this is the first to be linked to the Middle East. It is not known if the fragments were part of a larger object whose other materials did not survive – or the remains of small objects. *BBC News, D.Mail, 1 Dec 2016.*

MOUND MUCH OLDER

The largest Iron Age earthwork in Britain has been identified at the former site of a Norman castle. The mound at Skipsea Castle in East Yorkshire is 278ft (85m) in diameter and 42ft (13m) high. It was thought to be part of a Norman motte-and-bailey dating from 1086, but archæological analysis of soil from its core showed it is 2,500 years old. Dr Jim Leary, from the University of Reading, who led the excavation of the site near Bridlington, added: "It's the largest Iron Age mound in Britain and there it was hiding from us in plain sight. The key question now is what was this mound used for? Was it a burial mound? Is it comparable to some of the really big burial mounds in Germany and Switzerland and eastern France of that period? If so, that's really significant." A comparable mound of size and age to that in Skipsea exists at Heuneburg in Germany. *BBC News, 3 Oct; Times, 4 Oct 2016.*

PAUL SIEVEKING

LADY ANNE HILL

JIJI PRESS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ROMAN COINS IN JAPAN

In December 2013, 10 eroded coins were unearthed during an excavation of Katsuren Castle on Okinawa Island in Japan. They languished unremarked in storage for over two years until spotted by a visiting archæologist. Four were ancient Roman bronze coins, one from the reign of Constantine I (AD 306-337), while a fifth, dating from 1687, came from the Ottoman Empire. The coins came from a layer a metre underground believed to date from the 14th or 15th century – which make the Ottoman coin's presence particularly puzzling. The remaining five coins are still being studied. The castle, which was built in the late 13th century and abandoned in 1458, was known to have been the focal point of commerce with China and other Asian countries, but there is no evidence of a Europe connection – apart from the coins, the first from the Roman Empire ever found in Japan. *[CNN] D.Mail online, Independent online, 27 Sept; [AP] 18 Oct 2016.*

CHINESE IN AFRICA

A team of Kenyan and Chinese archæologists have found a remarkable coin that seems to confirm that a Chinese expeditionary fleet under the eunuch admiral Zheng He (or Cheng Ho), reached East Africa in the 1420s, about 80 years before the first Europeans (Portuguese and Dutch). The team has been excavating a number of sites in the village of Mambrui on Kenya's north coast that they believe might be the original site of the ancient Sultanate of Malindi. Until now, Vasco Da Gama was believed to be responsible for opening up the region. The notion that Zheng He also explored the American coastline, as proposed by Gavin Menzies, is more contentious (see **FT160:6**). For evidence of Chinese contact with the Americas from the third century BC onwards, see **FT134:12**. *BBC News, 18 Oct 2016.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

208: JUST KIDDING

"We marvelled at little girls" – Fort, *Many Parts*, p104

Today's children (the cliché runs) are feral, have everything, want more, their Christmas mornings awash in techno-toys and wrapping paper. Usually the opposite for ancient kiddiwinkies. Literature, Myth, and Real Life paint a sorry tale, with Juvenal's (*Satire* 14 v47) *Maxima debetur puero reverentia* (The greatest possible respect should be paid to a child – Englished without acknowledgement by Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 4) largely ignored.

Slaughter of the First-Born and Massacre of the Innocents are universally remembered child holocausts, respectively crimes of a god and a king. The Old Testament frequently accuses others (notably the Canaanites) of religious infanticide: Deuteronomy 12. 31, Ezekiel 16: 20-1, Jeremiah 7: 30-4, 2 Kings 17: 17-8, Psalm 106: 37-8.

The Carthaginians had an especially malodorous reputation for roasting babies as offerings to Baal. Modern scholarship variously accepts or denies: Shelby Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice* (1991); Lawrence Stager, 'Child Sacrifice at Carthage,' *Biblical Archeological Review* 10 (1984), 31-51; M'hamed Hassine Fantar, 'Were Living Children Sacrificed to the Gods in Punic Carthage?' – vigorous online denial.

Negation involves rejecting a depressingly large number of respectable ancient sources, conveniently assembled online by Roger Pearse. Take Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, bk20 ch14 paras6-7: "Their city had a bronze image of Cronus, extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each child when placed therein rolled down and fell into a gaping pit filled with fire."

Other accounts, from Alexander's biographer Clitarchus to the Byzantine Suda encyclopædia, claim the burning children seemed to be smiling, thereby producing an etymology for 'Sardonic laughter'.

Baby barbeques were also political ("You're not going to kebab me!" – Neil Kinnock). As I described in **FT302:27**, Alexander's ferocious mother Olympias – she was Albanian, which explains a lot – roasted rival royal infants Caranus and Europe. The equally earthy Amestris, wife of King Xerxes, buried 14 children alive for dynastic reasons (Herodotus, bk7 ch114).

Astyanax, infant son of Hector, was flung from the walls of Troy: sources include Euripides, Ovid, Pausanias, and Arctinus's *Capture of Troy* which (as do some vase paintings) has Neoptolemos (son of Achilles – that great heel) club old King Priam to death with the infant corpse.

Medea murdered her children to spite ex-Argonaut hubbie Jason for playing away – rather more drastic than just cutting up his shirts and suing the pants off him.

Thucydides (bk7 ch29) rightly singles out as the greatest atrocity of the Peloponnesian War the slaughter of all the schoolchildren at their desks by a gang of Thracian mercenaries – such abominations nowadays too often paralleled in African civil wars.

Not every child victim draws tears. Caligula was delighted that infant Julia Drusilla showed herself his true daughter by scratching at playmates' eyes and faces with her nails. When he was bumped off, she jumped on an assassin's shoulder, biting and gouging, whereupon he understandably dashed out her brains on a wall (Suetonius, *Life of Caligula*, chs 25 & 59).

A couple of child prodigies to alleviate this litany. Pliny (*Natural History*, bk 7 ch52 para175) says the boy Epimenides of Crete anticipated Rip Van Winkle by falling asleep for 57 years, immediately turned old, but hung on to 157 – "All Cretans are liars, said the Cretan" (ancient proverb).

A friend of Neo-Platonist Porphyry (*On Abstinence*, bk3 ch3) had a slave boy who could understand the language of birds – prefiguring Snoopy in Peanuts – until his mother, fearing he'd be sent away as a present to the emperor, destroyed his gift by pissing in his sleeping ears – no more birds in his shell-like.

There being little or no law on sexual consent, children were even more vulnerable then than those in the 'care' of Catholic priests. Tiberius, not content with raping two boys and then breaking their legs, had infants (nicknamed 'minnows') trained to fellate him whilst swimming (Suetonius' *Life,* ch43 – writing in 'Disgusted from Tunbridge Wells' style. Commodus's harem of 300 females and as many males, included his favourite, an eight-year-old lad (Strato compiled an entire book (*Greek Anthology* 12) of epigrams extolling pæderasty – cf. Daryl Hines's 2002 *Puerilities* translation – joyfully pointing out that the Greek words for bottom and gold were numerically identical. Happy ending, for once. The cute catamite innocently gave Commodus's mistress Marcia a list of intended executees, including herself, thus allowing her to forestall by getting his personal trainer to strangle him in the bath.

Things could be as bad in Christian Byzantium, the nadir reached by Irene who secured the throne (797-802) by having son Constantine blinded, thus disqualifying him from succession, an atrocity postluded by a 17-day solar eclipse and total darkness, supposedly signifying Heavenly horror – Irene, Goodnight!

MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

THE EMDRIVE SPACE RACE

DAVID HAMBLING brings us the latest updates in the saga of the EmDrive, the physics-defying propellantless space drive that might just be making the leap into the mainstream.

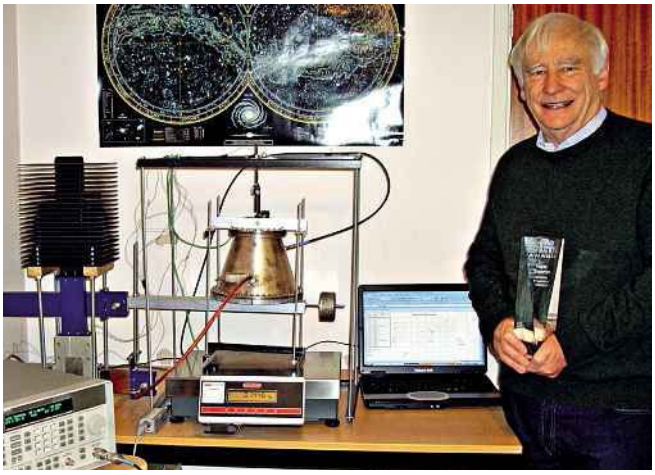
The EmDrive, a propellantless space drive invented by British engineer Roger Shawyer (see **FT332:14**), continues to gain strength, in spite of the efforts of respectable scientists to destroy it. In fact, the EmDrive seems poised to make the giant leap into space, shooting up from four different directions.

The EmDrive is a truncated metal cone filled with resonating microwaves. For reasons that are not fully understood, or at any rate are highly disputed, there appears to be a difference in the force exerted by the microwaves on the two ends. Incredibly, it seems to produce a net thrust in violation of Newton's laws. Most physicists reject the device out of hand, assuming that there is an error in the experimental set-up or that the researchers are fraudsters.

Any conventional rocket has to have propellant – material which is ejected out the back to push the rocket forward. Satellites have abundant Solar power, but their useful life is dictated by the supply of propellant required to adjust their attitude and orbit. Half the launch weight of a typical satellite is reaction mass. If the EmDrive works, a satellite could have half the weight and half the launch cost – and an indefinite lifespan. It would transform the multibillion-dollar satellite market, as well as providing a quick transit to Mars.

Sceptics have complained about the lack of peer-reviewed journal papers on the EmDrive, as these are the gold standard for scientific evidence. Then, in December, a paper was published by NASA's Eagleworks team.

The paper, which appeared in the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AAIAA) *Journal of Propulsion and Power*, was titled "Measurement of Impulsive Thrust from a Closed Radio-Frequency Cavity in Vacuum". Vacuum is important, as critics have suggested that the apparent thrust in previous tests was caused by thermal effects or other glitches created by air.



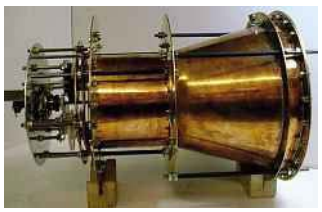
ABOVE: Roger Shawyer, the British engineer and inventor of the EmDrive.
BELOW: The science behind the EmDrive has been rejected by most physicists.

The thrust measured was tiny – a matter of millinewtons, not enough to push a toy car – but it was consistent.

Sceptics now say that just because there is a peer-reviewed paper, it does not mean the results are valid. There is still argument over how the EmDrive might work. The paper suggests it is pushing against a flux of 'virtual particles' that pop in and out of existence. This, of course, is not easy to reconcile with existing physics. NASA regards the maverick Eagleworks team as an embarrassment and it is not clear if the team will continue. But while they may be the most prestigious, these NASA developments might not be the most important in the EmDrive story.

Other researchers intend to cut through all the arguments by launching an EmDrive into space to prove that it really produces thrust – and that it can carry on doing so for longer than any satellite equipped with a conventional system.

Guido Fetta's Cannae Drive is similar to, but distinct from, Shawyer's design, but is still another propellantless drive based on microwaves in a resonant cavity. The Eagleworks team tested an earlier version. Now Fetta has formed a company called Theseus with industrial partners LAI International and SpaceQuest Ltd. Theseus exists to launch a Cannae thruster on a shoebox-sized satellite into a low orbit 150 miles above the surface of the Earth.



Fetta expects the satellite to stay on station for at least six months, rather than the six weeks that would be typical for a satellite this size. The longer the satellite remains in orbit, the more convincing a demonstration it will be of thrust without propellant. The launch date has not been set but is expected to be before the end of 2017.

"Once demonstrated on orbit, Theseus will offer our thruster platforms to the satellite marketplace," says the Theseus website. Whether there are any takers is another matter.

It may not be the only EmDrive in orbit. As previously described (**FT320:12**), Shawyer's claims inspired a Chinese team led by Juan Yang at Xi'an Northwest Polytechnic University to replicate his experiments. They achieved the same results, measuring thrust and publishing a series of papers which have been ignored in the West.

The Chinese researchers have been quiet, and have not made any public comment since their first results in 2008. In February 2016, Yang's team published a paper on testing the thruster with a sensitive new type of torsion balance, concluding that: "independent microwave thruster propulsion device did not detect significant thrust". In the absence of any other news, some suspected that this meant the end for the Chinese EmDrive.

However, in a surprise move, China's *Science & Technology* weekly magazine ran a story on the EmDrive in December. This described a press conference staged in Beijing by the China Academy of Space Technology (CAST), and the manufacturer of the Dong Fang Hong satellites, in which they discussed EmDrive research and plans to develop the technology.

Dr Chen Yue, head of CAST's communication satellite division, said that several prototype thrusters had been built and proven to produce thrust. The next stage was engineering: the designs need to be optimised and the Q-factor of the resonant cavity (equivalent to how long a tuning fork rings when struck) has to be improved to increase thrust. Once a satisfactory drive is built, it will be sent up on a satellite and its effectiveness proved in space.

The timing of this announcement is interesting. While the NASA paper and Fetta's Theseus announcement have received a lukewarm reception here, the Chinese might have felt compelled to break cover – and they must be reasonably confident of winning the EmDrive space race to go public.

The final contender is none other than British EmDrive inventor Roger Shawyer, who has set up a new joint venture called Universal Propulsion. He is backed by the Gilo Industries Group, whose other unusual projects include a flying dune buggy called the Parajet Skyquad. Shawyer is not able to give details yet, but hints that a major announcement is forthcoming. This could mean a space launch.

2017 could prove to be a big year for Shawyer's invention – and the next time you read about the EmDrive it might be in a less exclusive publication than *Fortean Times*.

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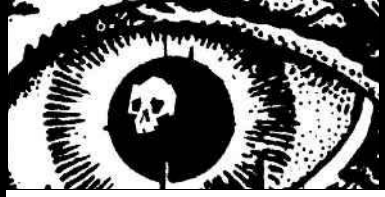


MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE finds that there's nowt so queer as folk when it comes to psychical research.

GAY GHOST HUNTERS

Back in 1954, veteran psychical researcher and criminologist Professor Donald West observed: "It is a human failing among investigators that each one thinks himself the right man to look into a spontaneous case. The task is in practice a delicate one, requiring not only skill in understanding and handling different temperaments, but also a critical judgment of evidence" (*Psychical Research Today*, 1954, 1962).

I was reminded of this sage advice with an item brought to my attention in December 2016, which proved a marked departure from the usual seasonal ghost story. Appearing under the headline "We're Here, We're Queer, We're Ghosts", it reported on the US-based Stonewall Columbus Queer Ghost-Hunting Club of Ohio, which seeks to link ghostly phenomena, same-sex attraction and the denizens of the spirit world. Promoting itself via the Internet, the club presents itself as the first organisation "dedicated exclusively to hunting queer spirits" and recalls "a successful year of hunts… from lesbian convents to theaters, mansions, insane asylums, prisons." A Youtube web series, Queer Ghost Hunters, records their adventures, declaring their stated mission as being "to make contact with gay and lesbian spirits", and "help 'gay' ghosts come out", apparently all part of a wider ideological or political goal of "resisting the often presumed heterosexuality of ghosts".

For instance, their two-part broadcast *Queer Ghost Hunters: Lesbian Nun Ghosts Parts 1 & 2* shows various female/transgender members embarking on a search for ghostly lesbian nuns in a Toledo cemetery and at a former convent site. Part I begins by airing their suspicions that lesbian nuns have existed from the 4th century AD and – with a leap of logic – conclude that they must therefore have been present at their local former Ursuline convent site in Toledo (there is no hard evidence they admit, but much optimistic supposition). Then with a breezy lack of sensitivity, the group travel to a nun's cemetery to bawl out invitations to the ghostly lesbian sisters, dead and buried in excess of 80 years, asking them to come and join them, and even offering the spirits a free ride in their car. "Hop in!" declares group leader Lori Gum, swinging the vehicle door open in readiness for spectral lesbian passengers. The group's objective then becomes ferrying the spirits back to their former convent home (now an arts centre) to facilitate further contact and discuss their experience of lesbianism by means of divining rods and 'spirit boxes'. (See 'The surprisingly serious search for gay spooks' by Matt Baume in *Vice*, 19 Dec 2016 at https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/were-here-were-queer-were-ghosts; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcopH6ppN-0)

PHOTOS: QUEER GHOST-HUNTING CLUB OF OHIO

ABOVE AND BELOW: The Queer Ghost-Hunting Club of Ohio have taken their investigations online with episodes such as the two-part *Lesbian Nun Ghosts*.

Needless to say, inviting any ghost, let alone the shade of a Sapphic nun, to take a ride in your car is not a scientific technique recognised by psychical research. But obviously, for the Columbus Group, things have moved on since Harry Price tried observing the ghostly nun of Borley in the 1930s (though casually offering rides to spirits may provide a potentially new and exciting approach to the phantom hitchhiker phenomenon). However, arriving back at the centre, suitably wired up and speaking in hushed, awestruck tones, things don't exactly go as planned since the group believe they are channelling a deceased nun who is "angry".

Group member Shane McClelland believes this contributes to preserving social history, enabling gay spirits to share their past experiences. "Queer history is largely unrecorded," said McClelland. "There isn't a tradition of passing down stories. If you were recording stuff, you were putting yourself and your friends at risk of being discovered."

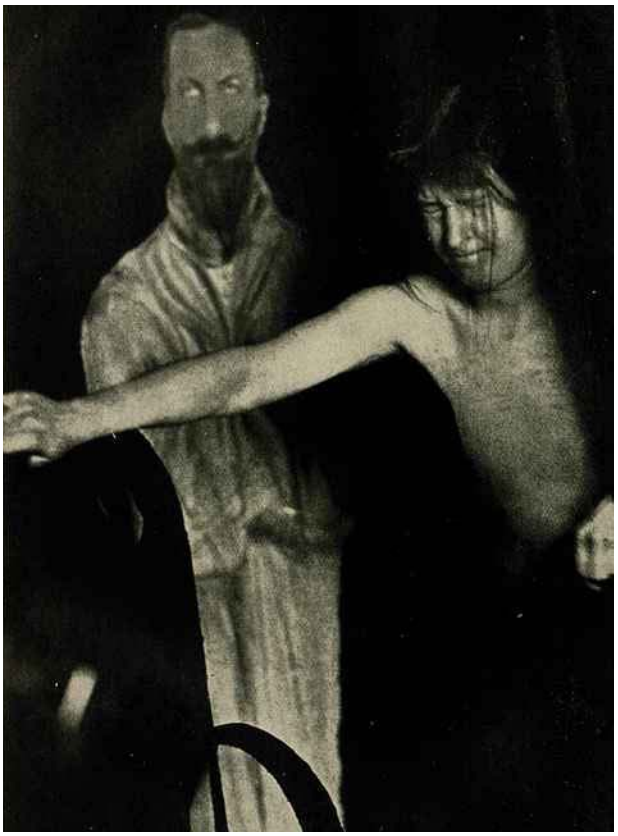
Any doubts over whether spirits actually display sexual characteristics, or that women in the past may not have identified themselves in such explicit lesbian terms (see *Surpassing The Love of Men: Romantic Friendships and Love between Women from*

the Renaissance to the Present, 1983, by Lillian Faderman), that before 1925 the word lesbian would have been little known beyond classicists, or that there may not actually be any spirits of any orientation present outside their imagination, inhibit the group and their hopes of talking with such beings not one bit. Sisters at the current Ursuline Convent in Toledo, founded in 1854, are not approached for comment.

Clearly, if American graveyard antics and ghost hunting with a touch of lesbianism is your cup of tea, these may be ideal films for you. Otherwise, sincere and self-convinced the group may be, these films really serve only as a permanent memorandum of the continuing accuracy of Professor West's 60-year-old observations. It remains the long-standing problem of ghost investigation, and paranormal research in general, that they are bedevilled by self-deception and by those who seem incapable of refraining from distortion, exaggeration and unfounded interpretation arising from their own pre-existing notions.

Further proof of this problem was amply demonstrated a week earlier in the British press, with claims made by another organisation fixing on the topic of same-sex attraction and ghosts, albeit one with whom the Columbus group are unlikely to agree. "People are gay because they're possessed by ghosts" was the stark headline in *Metro* (10 Dec 2016) announcing a report emerging from an organisation styling itself the Spiritual Science Research Foundation. Proving just how easy it is to be duped by ornament, the appearance of the word "science" in this Institute's title proved enough for *Metro* to declare their claims as originating from "paranormal experts". However, alert readers would have noted in taking inspiration from Buddhist philosophy and by professing to be "spiritual", the Institute could not simultaneously be termed "scientific" within the ordinary meaning and usage of the word, at least as applied in English-speaking countries. Bluntly, the Institute attributed many instances of same sex attraction displayed by living humans to possession by ghosts of the opposite sex, declaring: "The main reason behind the gay orientation of some men is that they are possessed by female ghosts. It is the female ghost in them that is attracted to other men. Conversely, the attraction to females experienced by some lesbians is due to the presence of male ghosts in them." Not only is sexual orientation thus warped by the invading spirit, but their hosts display their symptoms in a "shameless and aggressive manner" manifested by participation in "gay parades".

Unsurprisingly, not a scintilla of evidence is supplied for these pronouncements. Rather it provided yet another depressing illustration of how, when it comes to ghosts, simplistic pre-existing beliefs and ideology easily find a platform in today's fast-moving and sensationalist pop media.



LEFT: Medium Eva C (Marthe Beraud), here photographed materialising a spirit whilst in the nude (the photo has clearly been retouched to remove any troubling boobage), was one of a number of probably queer figures in early psychical research.

> "PEOPLE ARE GAY BECAUSE THEY ARE POSSESSED BY GHOSTS"

The problem of *a priori* beliefs is rife in research (though not by any means confined to ghosts). For example, some ghost hunters believe it is possible for thermal cameras and infra-red technology to detect spirits, an idea derived from speculation paranormal activity is linked to changes in temperature, both being reported in séance rooms and haunted premises. But any such connection is frankly tentative, there being no undisputed evidence for ghosts or spirits (again presuming they exist) actually possessing any thermal properties. Thus, if we can't be sure spirits have thermal properties, we should show great caution before attributing any other quality to them. Even presuming spirits exist, we lack conclusive proof of post-mortem persistence of sexual characteristics.

This is not a plea for scepticism but instead a call for taking these topics more seriously. People undoubtedly experience apparitions, and there is a vast literature concerning so-called possession states accumulated over the centuries. There is also much evidence collected by psychical researchers suggestive of reincarnation, an idea current since the 6th century BC and shared by millions of Buddhists and Hindus worldwide, many of them deep thinkers, mystics and profound scholars. But it does not necessarily follow, nor should it be considered proved beyond reasonable doubt, that apparitions are spirits of the dead or that discarnate entities have powers to influence or control the sexual characteristics of the living. Not only ought other possibilities be considered, but it is essential that they are, not least because there is great deal of the data that might be interpreted as pointing in wholly opposite directions.

Philosophically it is difficult enough to identify the self in the living, a whole strand of modern philosophy, from 19th century determinism and Gilbert Ryle's 'Ghost in the Machine' (in *The Concept of Mind*, 1949) seeking to reject even that. But if something equating to human personality survives after death (whether in some disembodied form, reincarnated or possessing another), then we are obliged to face what we mean by saying that the surviving portion is identical with the deceased person. In the absence of a body and brain, this becomes rather difficult especially since many personality traits and characteristics evade objective measurement in life.

Numerous studies have revealed the complex and multi-faceted nature of human sexuality. Essentially, human beings are biosocial animals with a make-up influenced by biological, psychological and social factors, all flowing together like eddies and currents in a river and producing widely varying and unpredictable diversity within individuals. Whole sexual categories remain ill-defined or controversial, with still-flourishing disputes as to what qualifies as normal or abnormal behaviour. With such uncertainties about the living – not to mention the unresolved mystery of consciousness itself – we can scarcely be confident about what may happen following physical dissolution of brain and body. We step into the very fortean territory of trying to address one unknown by reference to another.

That "sex remains the last mystical experience" in the materialist West is a view endorsed by a range of modern thinkers – e.g. satirist turned religious apologist

FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Lady Troubridge (seated) and her lover Radclyffe Hall were members of the SPR. **ABOVE LEFT**: Daniel Home, giving the Gay Gordons a whole new meaning.

Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990) in *Time and Eternity* (2011) to contemporary philosophers such as Bryan Magee in *Confessions of a Philosopher* (1997). This is also one reason why potential links between psychic phenomena and sexuality have been relatively little studied by psychical researchers and parapsychologists (see 'Psi and Sexuality', 1985, by Michael K Macbeath in the *SPR Journal*, vol.53. 65-77). Another reason is that such investigations were discouraged by the 'father of parapsychology' JB Rhine (1895-1981), worried that such associations would impede the acceptance of parapsychology as a science (see *Unbelievable*, 2013, by Stacy Horn). But to imagine that there has been a complete lack of awareness surrounding sexual issues on the part of psychical researchers, and particularly concerning the presence of homosexual or lesbian individuals, is wholly mistaken.

In its early years, psychical research attracted a number of pioneers of scientific studies of human sexuality; for instance, it has been forgotten by most psychoanalysts that Freud's first paper in English appeared in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1911. Another was Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, an author who conducted extensive investigations of medium Eva C (Marthe Beraud) and Juliette Bisson, the woman with whom she lived during the height of her mediumistic career, and whom it is considered "almost certainly had a sexual relationship" (*The Spiritualists*, 1983, by Ruth Brandon).

A number of observers of the 19th century medium Daniel Home agreed he had homosexual tendencies, an opinion also expressed 70 years ago by Eric J Dingwall (1890-1986), distinguished in both psychical research and sexology (see *Some Human Oddities*, 1947). Similarly, investigators into the trance mediumship of the teenage Schneider brothers in Austria in the 1920s considered the boys expressed erotic feelings towards male sitters as a channel for homosexual desires (*The Haunted Mind*, 1959, by Nandor Fodor), although Rudi Schneider later married a girl named Mitzi, whereupon his powers waned.

During the same period Una Lady Troubridge, and her lover Marguerite (later 'John') Radclyffe Hall, author of the lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) banned after an obscenity trial, were active members of the SPR, holding numerous sittings with mediums (see *Proceedings of the SPR*, vol. XXX). Lady Troubridge served on the SPR Council whilst Hall harboured ambitions of developing mediumship (*The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, 1999, by Diana Souhami). As well as conducting extensive psi research, Professor DJ West, cited above, authored the landmark study *Homosexuality* (1955), influencing reform of the law and the decriminalisation of homosexual acts achieved by the Sexual Offences Act 1967. The view that a high percentage of gifted sensitives and mediums were homosexually inclined has been postulated by a number of parapsychologists (e.g. Paper to the International Study Group of Unorthodox Healing, April 27-May 1st 1954 by Alan Assaily in *Proceedings of Four Conferences of Parapsychological Studies,* 1957; 'An Experimentally Testable Model for Spontaneous Psi Events (I). Extrasensory Events' (1974) by Rex Stanford, *Journal of the American SPR*, vol.68, 34-57).

Nor, in this regard, is the old complaint that "Academics do nothing and investigators know nothing" sustainable. Although rivals in their Ghost Club days, British ghost hunters Philip Paul and Peter Underwood were alert to sexual issues affecting residents of haunted houses. As early as the Ash Manor case in Kent in 1934, Nandor Fodor recognised sexual issues were beneath the surface of what appeared to be a traditional haunting where a married couple heard ghostly noises and the wife witnessed the apparition of a small, wizened man resembling a tramp. Investigating their psychological make-up, Fodor realised the marriage was a sham, between a heterosexual woman with a homosexual husband. The wife was left unhappy and unfulfilled with feelings of personal failure. Fodor interpreted the apparition as a representation of her impotent husband. In 1967 William Roll identified repressed homosexual tendencies in a 19-year-old Cuban named Julio, the focus of the well-observed poltergeist that manifested in a Miami warehouse (see *The Poltergeist,* 1972).

Then there was also the unusual case from Sussex in 1973, of the haunting at the country home of a well-known TV actor, known to be gay, and investigated by ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004). But that, like Sherlock Holmes's 'Great Rat of Sumatra', is a story for another time.

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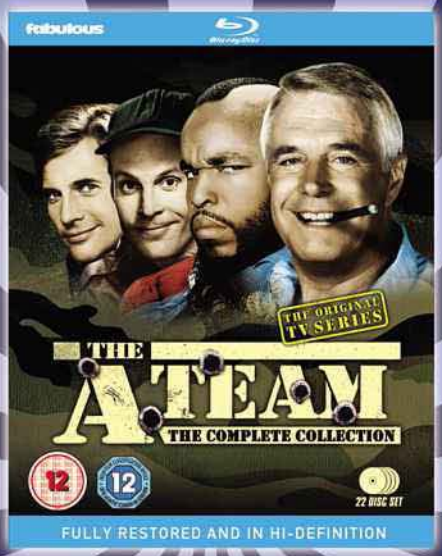

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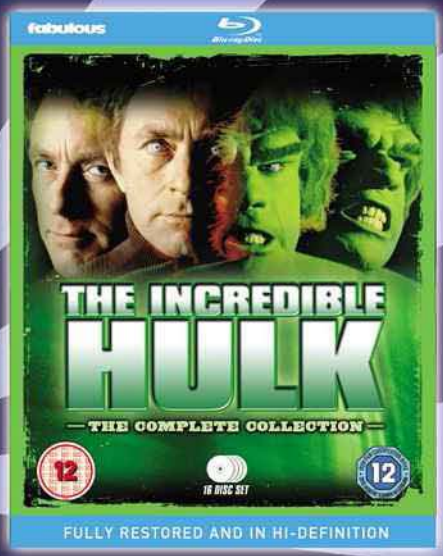

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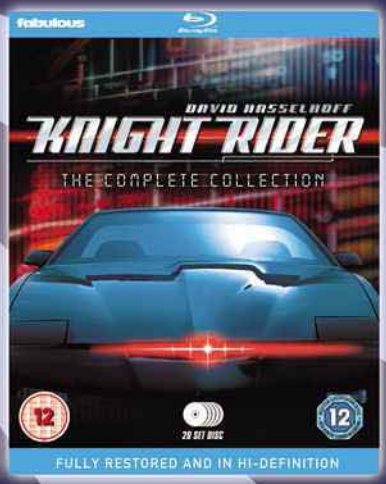

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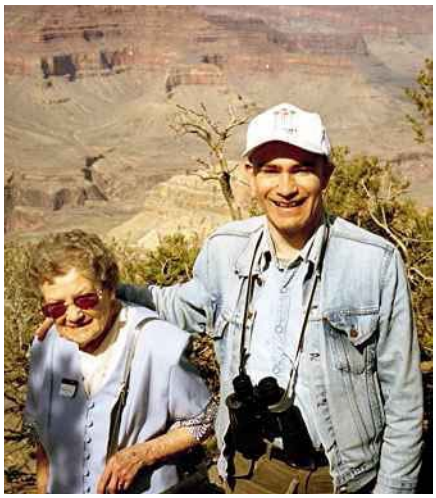
A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

LOREN COLEMAN



KARL SHUKER

JAVED AHMED

FAR LEFT: The Golden Yeti. **LEFT**: Karl Shuker and his late mother visiting Grand Canyon in 2004. **ABOVE**: The newly-named Sorting Hat spider *Eriovixia gryffindori,* its name deriving from JK Rowling's Harry Potter books

MY GOLDEN YETIS

My personal cryptozoological highlight of 2016 was to receive in December two prestigious Golden Yetis – the highly-coveted, veritable Oscar, Emmy, or Bafta of cryptozoology – awarded by Loren Coleman and the International Cryptozoology Museum (ICM) in their annual cryptozoology round-up. One was awarded to me as 'Cryptozoologist of the Year 2016', and the other to my newest book, *Still In Search Of Prehistoric Survivors* (Coachwhip Publishing, 2016), as 'Cryptozoology Book of the Year 2016'. In addition, my previous book, *Here's Nessie! A Monstrous Compendium From Loch Ness* (CFZ Press, 2016) also made Loren's top 10 'Best Cryptozoology Books of 2016' list. I would like to thank Loren and the ICM for bestowing such a great honour upon me.

I also wish to dedicate my awards to my late mother, Mary Shuker, who would have been so proud, as she always was of all that I achieved. It was she who bought for me so very long ago the humble little paperback edition of Bernard Heuvelmans's classic *On the Track of Unknown Animals* that fired what became my life-long passion; and without her constant love and encouragement none of this would ever have been possible.

http://www.cryptozoonews.com/czist-2016/ 7 Dec 2016; http://www.cryptozoonews.com/czbksof16/ 9 Dec 2016.

THE SORTING HAT SPIDER

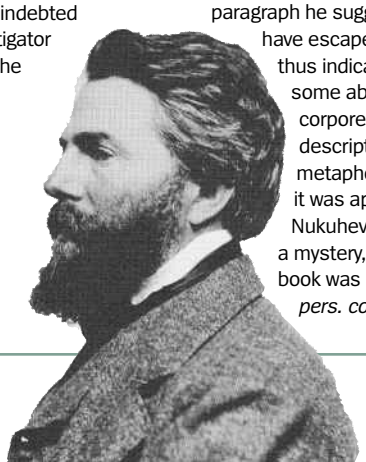
Many new species of spider are discovered and described every year, so it takes a very special example to attract international media attention, but *Eriovixia gryffindori* is certainly one such example. Formally described and named in December 2016, this small, brown, but very remarkable-looking nocturnal spider was found in a sacred grove within the unique 'Kans' forestlands of central Western Ghats, in the Shivamogga district of Karnataka, India, by a team of Indian scientists that includes one of my Facebook friends, Javed Ahmed. What makes it so distinctive is its body's extraordinary, vertically triangular shape, irresistibly reminiscent of the speaking Sorting Hat from JK Rowling's Harry Potter novels. And indeed, when describing this dramatic new species in their *Indian Journal of Arachnology* paper, the team included the following explanation for the scientific name given to it by them:

"This uniquely shaped spider derives its name from the fabulous, sentient magical artefact, the sorting hat, owned by the (fictitious) medieval wizard Godric Gryffindor, one of the four founders of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and stemming from the powerful imagination of Ms JK Rowling, wordsmith extraordinaire, as presented in her beloved series of books, featuring everyone's favorite boy-wizard, Harry Potter. An ode from the authors, for magic lost, and found, in an effort to draw attention to the fascinating, but oft overlooked world of invertebrates, and their secret lives."

Moreover, in response to receiving this tribute to her work, on 11 December Rowling personally tweeted the following message on Twitter: "I'm truly honoured! Congratulations on discovering another #FantasticBeast!". What a magical discovery for all concerned! *https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/12/13/harry-potter-loving-scientists-find-spider-that-looks-amazingly-like-the-sorting-hat-name-it-eriovixia-gryffindori/?utm_term=.16be500ef055 13 Dec 2016; http://indianarachnology.com/ija/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ija_2016_v5_n1_2_p7_24_27.pdf Dec 2016.*

MELVILLE'S MYSTERY CAT

It's always particularly interesting to learn of a possible cryptozoogical encounter featuring a famous person, so I am greatly indebted to German mystery beast investigator Ulrich Magin for kindly bringing the following, hitherto unpublicised example to my attention. The eyewitness in question is none other than *Moby-Dick* author Herman Melville (right), who documented his intriguing sighting in one of his non-fiction books, namely *Typee: A Peep At Polynesian Life* (1846).



Describing time spent on the Polynesian island of Nukuheva in the Marquesas group, he included the following memorable passage:

"As for the animal that made the fortune of my lord mayor Whittington, I shall never forget the day that I was lying in the house about noon, everybody else being fast asleep; and happening to raise my eyes, met those of a big black spectral cat, which sat erect in the doorway, looking at me with its frightful goggling green orbs, like one of those monstrous imps that tormented some of the olden saints! I am one of those unfortunate persons, to whom the sight of these animals is at any time an insufferable annoyance.

"Thus constitutionally averse to cats in general, the unexpected apparition of this one in particular utterly confounded me. When I had a little recovered from the fascination of its glance, I started up; the cat fled, and emboldened by this, I rushed out of the house in pursuit; but it had disappeared. It was the only time I ever saw one in the valley, and how it got there I cannot imagine. It is just possible that it might have escaped from one of the ships at Nukuheva. It was in vain to seek information on the subject from the natives, since none of them had seen the animal, the appearance of which remains a mystery to me to this day."

What I find intriguing about this report is how Melville ostensibly changed his opinion as to the nature of the cat during his description. Whereas in the first paragraph he referred to it as spectral and likened it to a saint-bothering imp, thereby implying that it appeared to be some form of paranormal entity, in the second paragraph he suggested that it might have escaped from a visiting ship, thus indicating that it was merely some absconded kitty of the corporeal kind. True, his 'spectral' description may simply have been metaphorical, but whatever it was, it was apparently not native to Nukuheva, and does indeed remain a mystery, 170 years after Melville's book was published. *Ulrich Magin, pers. comm., 10 Jan 2017.*

AMAZING ART FINDS

Gainsborough's earliest painting, a Leonardo study and a tapestry commissioned by Henry VIII

PHILIPPE LOPEZ / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: The earliest known painting by Gainsborough. **ABOVE RIGHT**: This study of St Sebastian included optical studies and Italian right-to-left script on the reverse.

• Browsing a regional auction catalogue, Robert Mulraine, a retired company director, fulfilled every buyer's dream: picking up an Old Master for a song. With the help of his son James, an art restorer, as an "extra pair of eyes", he paid £2,600 for a misattributed portrait of a woman. It has now been reliably identified as the earliest known painting by Thomas Gainsborough, created around 1742 when he was 15. It will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné by Hugh Belsey, the art historian and world authority on Gainsborough. Previously, the earliest known painting by the Suffolk master was one of a dog painted in 1745. *D.Telegraph, 28 Dec 2016*.

• One day last March, an unnamed retired doctor from somewhere in central France visited Thaddée Prate, director of old master pictures at the Tajan auction house in Paris, and showed him 14 unframed drawings that had been collected by his bibliophile father. Prate spotted a vigorous pen-and-ink study of St Sebastian tied to a tree, measuring 7.5x5in (19x13cm) and inscribed on the mount "Michelange" (Michelangelo). "I had a sense that it was an interesting 16th century drawing that required further work," he said. He consulted Patrick de Bayser, an independent dealer and adviser in Old Master drawings, who noted the drawing was by a left-handed artist (like Leonardo), and that on the reverse were two diagrammatic studies of candlelight with notes in a minute, Italian Renaissance right-to-left script (again, just like Leonardo).

Could it really be by Leonardo?

Could the pen-and-ink study really be by Leonardo?

A third opinion was sought from Carmen C Bambach, curator of Italian and Spanish drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, who organised the Met's 2003 exhibition "Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draughtsman". That show included two studies from museums in Hamburg and Bayonne that related to the "eight St Sebastians" listed by Leonardo in his *Codex Atlanticus* notebooks. "My eyes jumped out of their sockets," said Dr Bambach. The newly discovered drawing "exactly complemented the Hamburg St Sebastian," she added, referring to how that pen-and-ink study of the saint tied to a tree also included inscribed optical studies on the reverse, and very similar mirror writing. "The attribution is quite incontestable," she said, even though the drawing has no pre-20th century ownership history. The Paris drawing is the most highly developed and attractive of the three known studies associated with what may have been a lost painting. Unlike the monochromatic Hamburg drawing, it is executed in two shades of ink, features several alterations in the pose and has a mountainous landscape in the background. The drawing, estimated to date between 1482 and 1485, is now valued at £12.5 million. The highest price to date

for a Leonardo drawing sold at auction is £9.5 million, at Christie's in 2001, for a silverpoint study of a horse and rider. *NY Times (Int. edition), 13 Dec 2016.*

• While surfing the Internet, Professor Mary Beard, the Oxford classicist, discovered what might be a long-lost 16th century tapestry in the Persian Gallery, a shop selling antique carpets in mid-town Manhattan. The giant tapestry, depicting Julius Cæsar crossing he Rubicon, was one of a set of 10 depicting the life of the Roman hero commissioned by Henry VIII and said to be one of his greatest treasures. Last seen in the background of a portrait of Queen Caroline painted at Kensington Palace in 1819, the tapestries subsequently disappeared.

"Where did they go, how could they possibly have been sold off without anyone knowing?" asks Roger Michel, director of the Institute of Digital Archæology. "One possibility is there are frequent references to tapestries being sent for repair or rehanging and perhaps they were never collected." Mr Michel has discovered that the New York tapestry was in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution, which sold it at auction about 15 years ago. It might not be the original from Hampton Court Palace, as several pieces from later weavings from the same designs are still extant and were made during the 1560s and 1570s; Mr Michel, however, is convinced it *is* the original commissioned by the king, and hopes it can be returned to Hampton Court. It is thought to be worth £40,000 in its present state.

Professor Beard said: "I was searching for an image for a lecture and I put 'Cæsar tapestry' into the search engine and saw it on Google images. [The tapestries] were colossally valuable. They were the most prized possessions of the royal household. When the property of Charles I was inventoried after his execution, these tapestries were the second most valuable thing in the whole of the royal collection [valued at £5,022]." Made by highly skilled craftsmen, they took years to design and weave. Each individual piece from the Cæsar set was more than 9ft (2.7m) high by 25ft (7.6m) long and, hung end to end, measured 258ft (79m). Denying that she was some sort of online Indiana Jones, Professor Beard sounded a sceptical note on social media, tweeting: "FFS. If one more newspaper report claims I've found priceless set of Henry VIII tapestries in New York rug shop, I'll explode!"

Times, dailymail.co.uk, 26 Dec; D.Telegraph, 27 Dec 2016.

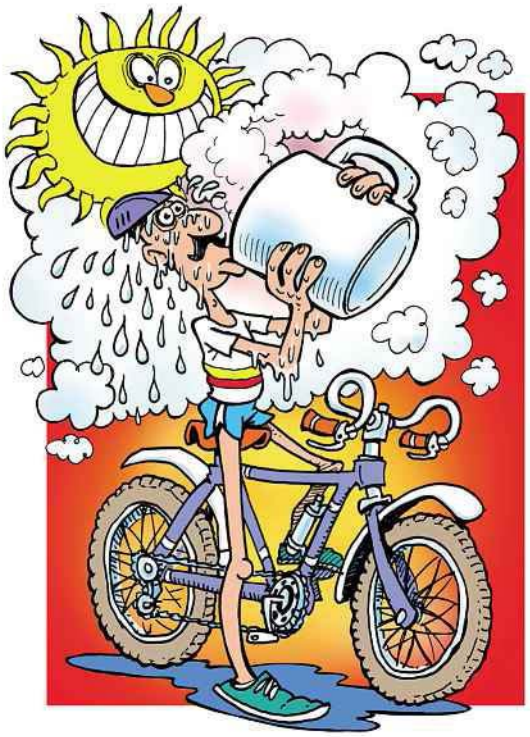
THE PERSIAN GALLERY

ABOVE: Mary Beard stumbled upon this tapestry online and identified it as a long-lost 16th century work commissioned by Henry VIII, or at least a slightly later copy of the same.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

208: THE COOLING CUPPA



ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

The myth

On a hot day, a hot drink will cool you down.

The "truth"

There are three stages to this story. It begins with children wilting in the summer heat being told that, no, they can't have money to buy a can of fizzy pop – what they need is a nice hot cuppa. The idea is that as you drink the hot liquid, your body will react by trying to negate its effect. You'll sweat more, and the blood vessels closest to the surface of your skin will expand to shed heat. Then came the debunking: the laws of thermodynamics insist that if you add heat to a system, that system must become hotter overall – not colder. This statement of the obvious stood as the 'truth' for many decades, until experiments on sweaty cyclists, conducted by the University of Ottawa, found that subjects who drank hot water stored less body heat than those who didn't – but only under certain circumstances. The amount of extra sweat caused by the hot drink is more significant than the extra heat, so there is a net loss of heat – provided *all* that sweat is free to evaporate. On a very humid day, or if you're wearing too many clothes, the sweat won't evaporate; on a very hot day, you might produce so much sweat that the extra will drip off you before it can evaporate. Under any of those conditions, you're better off with a cold drink – and to hell with what your granny says. Incidentally, the same research found that hot drinks don't, after all, raise core body temperature; it's thought to be 'thermosensors' in the mouth and throat that trigger the increased perspiration.

Sources

www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/a-hot-drink-on-a-hot-day-can-cool-you-down-1338875/?no-ist; https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22574769

Disclaimer

In this column's experience, once a myth has been debunked and rebunked, it's unlikely to lie still for long. If anything about our tentative 'truth' gets you hot under the collar, feel free to tell the letters page.

DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BOOK
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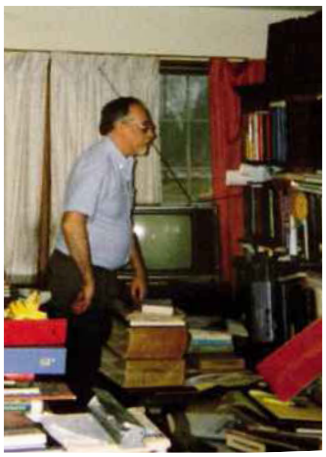
NECROLOG

This month, a veteran cryptozoologist who became FT's very first columnist hits the trail for the great unknown and a miraculous woman who fell to Earth heads for the heavens.



MARK A HALL

Mark Hall was already established as one of the USA's pioneering cryptozoologists when he became FT's very first columnist – his series 'Forteana USA' appearing in FT5 (July 1974) to FT7 (Nov 1974) – an early step in helping FT become a truly international publication.

Mark's interest in nature's anomalies began before he was a teenager. A thorough fortean, cryptozoologist, author and theorist, he travelled extensively, pursuing fieldwork, historical records and eyewitness testimony concerning cryptozoological phenomena. From 1992, for almost a decade, he published an occasional journal called *Wonders* – covering mystery cats, hairy hominoids, surviving anthropoids, ancient civilisations, 'fresh-water squid' and hundreds of other topics. Some of these journals were later expanded into books and republished.

Mark was raised in the heartland of America, near Bloomington, Minnesota (except for one brief attempt at living in North Carolina). During the Cold War, he served in Army intelligence as a Russian linguist in West Berlin. Besides being an editor for an archæological society based in Minnesota after his military service, he worked in human relations in various branches of the federal government, mostly for the Department of Agriculture and the Customs Service of his home state. His long-time friend and colleague Loren Coleman described him as "an old-fashioned patriot who allowed himself to question the scientific establishment". Always helpful to younger correspondents, Mark was a 'quiet American', cherishing his privacy while actively laying the foundations of cryptozoology for the generations ahead.

Mark had extensive files and a large library. Before he died he shipped more than 10 large boxes of his binders of original research materials to Loren Coleman's International Cryptozoology Museum (ICM) in Portland, Maine, where the archive will form part of his living legacy. Loren said that Mark "wanted his research to find a home where future generations could learn from his work." He recalled that he had first corresponded with Mark "when Ivan T Sanderson introduced us through letters in the late 1960s. Mark was in Minnesota, and I was living in Illinois. Before long, we visited each other and engaged in long conversations about unknown hominoids, cryptozoology, and our latest theories. On his first visit to my home, Mark and I stayed up into the early morning hours talking and talking, and completely forgot about sleeping. He was one of the most intellectual thinkers in the field, and we fed off each other's ideas via visits, letters, and phone conversations, long before emails and the Internet."

Ivan Sanderson had encouraged Hall and Coleman to keep track of the notorious 'Minnesota Iceman' exhibited at carnival sideshows throughout the Midwest during 1968-1969. Loren's interview with Mark about this period of their investigations appears in Loren's 'Afterword' in *Neanderthal: The Strange Saga of the Minnesota Iceman* (*Anomalist*, 2016), the first translation from French of Bernard Heuvelmans's original 1960s study of this enigmatic 'fossil' humanoid (which appeared to have been shot and preserved in ice).

Mark tended to avoid media appearances; apart from a few radio interviews, one exception was *Unsolved Mysteries,* for whom he detailed his investigations of the Iceman. He remained a director of Sanderson's Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained (SITU) until the early 1970s, when Sanderson died. Hall and Coleman made a few other radio appearances in 2005-2006, mainly to explain the phenomenon of Mothman. Hall, in particular, would reference American Indian legends of giant owls and 'Thunderbirds'; the huge owls, said Hall, are reportedly "man-sized with 10-foot wingspans". Accounts of giant birds go back to the 19th century, said Hall, reminding his audience of the 1977 case in Lawndale, Illinois, in which a young boy was picked up and carried briefly by a huge bird.

Mark was a bold theorist, noted Coleman. "He believed that North America is home not only to the Bigfoot of the Patterson-Gimlin footage, but also to remarkably different primates such as the 'True Giant' (probably *Gigantopithecus*, he thought) and the 'Taller-hominid' (which he saw as survivors of the historical fossil known as *Homo gardarensis*). It was Mark's incredible memory for detail, recalls Coleman, that allowed him to separate out the 'Marked Hominids' (as the 'Taller-hominid' came to be known) from the Bigfoot/Sasquatch group. This was the topic of his book *True Giants: Is Gigantopithecus Still Alive?* (2010).

His other published titles are *Natural Mysteries* (1991), *Living Fossils* (1999), *Thunderbirds: America's Living Legends of Giant Birds* (2004, 2009), and *The Yeti, Bigfoot & True Giants: An introduction* (1994, 1997, 2015).

Hall will also be remembered for advocating a more compassionate approach to the study of cryptids, without the unnecessary cruelty of shooting a Bigfoot or keeping a Lizardman in captivity. Instead, he promoted 'telebiology', an approach that "studies cryptids at a distance, using our brains and technology."

Mark Anthony Hall, fortean and cryptozoologist – born Minneapolis, Minnesota 14 June 1946; died from cancer 28 Sept 2016, aged 70.

VESNA VULOVIĆ

Air stewardess Vesna Vulović was not supposed to be on board a Yugoslav Airlines Douglas DC-9 on 26 January 1972, but a mix-up with another stewardess also called Vesna meant she joined the Belgrade-bound flight at Copenhagen. The last thing that she could remember was greeting the passengers. An hour into the journey the plane disintegrated above Srbská Kamenice, now in the Czech Republic. A Czech secret service investigation concluded that a bomb had been planted in the baggage hold, supposedly by Croat nationalists, but no arrests were made. Vulović was pinned into place by a food cart in the plane's tail section as it plummeted to earth from an altitude of 10,000m (32,800ft) in freezing temperatures. Pine trees and snow cushioned the final impact. Her screams were heard by woodsman Bruno Honke, who had served as a German Army medic in World War II and knew how to treat her bleeding. None of the other 27 people on board survived.

After arriving in hospital, Vulović fell into a coma for almost a month. She had a fractured skull, three broken vertebræ (one crashed completely), and two broken legs. The 3in (8cm) heels had been torn off her stilettos. "I was broken, and the doctors put me back together again," she said in 2008. "Nobody ever expected me to live this long." She was temporarily paralysed from the waist down but in time she made a near-full recovery and returned to work for the airline in a desk job. She never regained any memory

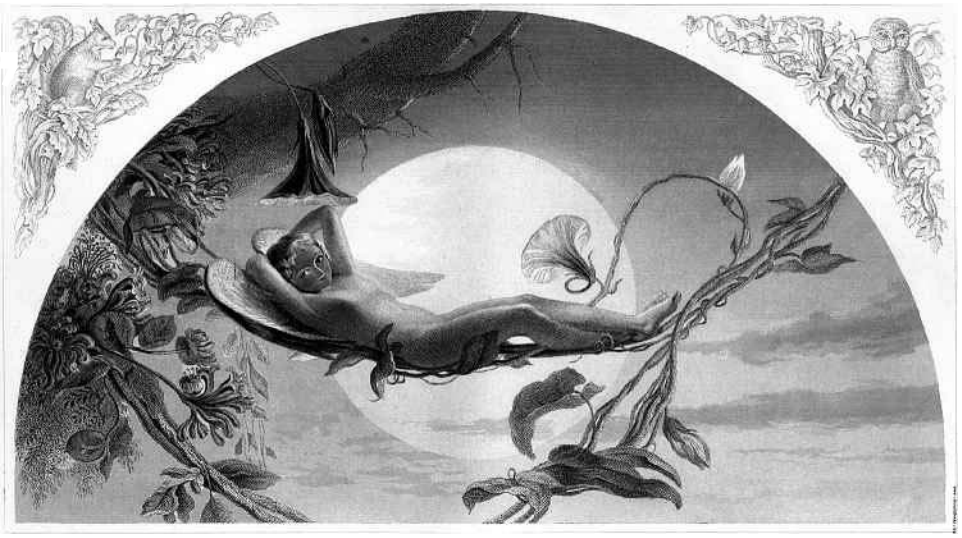
CTK / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

of the accident or of her rescue, and continued to fly as a passenger. "People always want to sit next to me on the plane," she said. She even enjoyed watching films featuring air disasters. She was, however, very scared of cockroaches.

The fall gained Vulović a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* of 1985 for the highest fall survived without a parachute, and she was presented with the award by Paul McCartney. Her survival was not unprecedented; in 1944, for instance, Nicholas Alkemade has recovered from a fall of 18,000ft (5,500m) in similar circumstances after jumping from his stricken Lancaster bomber. However, no one had escaped from such a height before. Tito, the Yugoslav dictator, turned her into a national heroine, and she channelled her fame into campaigning for political causes. She was fired from her job at the airline in 1990 after taking part in protests against President Slobodan Milošević, but her fame saved her from arrest. She continued for two more decades to fight against the resurgence of the far right in Serbia. "I am like a cat, I have had nine lives," she said. "But if nationalist forces in this country prevail, my heart will burst." She ascribed her survival to St Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church, on the eve of whose feast day she was saved. "It made me an optimist," she said of her experience. "If you can survive what I survived, you can survive anything."

In January 2009 German ARD radio correspondent Peter Hornung-Andersen together with Dutch and Czech journalists published a theory that the plane had been shot down in error by the Czechoslovak Air Force only a few hundred metres above the ground, while the evidence suggesting an explosion at high altitude had been forged by the Czechoslovak secret police. Vulović referred to the claims that the plane attempted a forced landing or descended to such low altitude as a "nebulous nonsense." The Czech Civilian Aviation Authority dismissed the conspiracy theory, and Hornung-Andersen himself stated that it was based on "circumstantial evidence, not proof". Furthermore, it appeared to be contradicted by data from the black boxes, independently analysed in Holland.

Vesna Vulovic, miraculous survivor, born Belgrade 3 Jan 1950; died Belgrade 23 Dec 2016, aged 66.



Fairies, Folklore and Forteana

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

MUSIC AT NIGHT

Beware! The following paragraph could cost you – particularly if you enjoy forteana and folklore – hours of your life. The Irish National Folklore Collection website (http://www.duchas.ie/en) has now digitised much of the Schools' Collection and put it up online for general use. The Schools' Collection was an inspired Irish project dating from 1937-39, whereby children from the 26 counties in the Republic gathered folklore from their families and neighbours. The result was an incredible half a million manuscript pages in English and Gaelic. Why should you care? Well, this was not just 'There once was a king…' material. Frequently, first-hand supernatural experiences were taken down. This must be, for example, one of the most substantial collections of ghost sightings in the world. Why, just this morning I was reading a little girl's lovely curvy handwriting describing how her grandfather had, as a young man, been kidnapped by the fairies. It happens even in the best families…

> IS NOCTURNAL FAIRY MUSIC AN AURAL EQUIVLENT OF BEING PIXY-LED AT NIGHT?

One type of fortean phenomena that is amply recorded is music from fairy forts. We all know the story. Person X is walking past a rath or fairy fort at midnight when a tune starts up from the shadows. These stories are so frequent that it has been suggested that there is a natural explanation for such nocturnes and here we have a usefully big sample for analysis. In a few instances there are very exact references. For example, one child reports how an invisible brass band marched between raths; another had heard of martial music being played by the Sidhe. Most references, though, are to wind instruments: bagpipes, pipes and also to high-pitched whistles (sometimes given as a warning). Nocturnal birds? There are references to bells. There are also references to noise rather than music: lots of feet dancing or walking; the thwack of a football being kicked (this on several occasions – frogs or toads calling?); and in one memorable case cutlery being laid on an underground table. I wonder whether nocturnal fairy music is not an aural equivalent of being pixy-led at night – the first depending on the ears being misled, the second on the eyes. In the dark, someone half asleep or slightly inebriated finds that their senses narrow in the blackness. In a heightened condition, they misconstrue sounds and create a human melody where there is just a run of natural noises and silences. There is good science for explaining how our sight plays tricks on us in the dark, but I'm not aware of any explanation in otology. I have, though, very occasionally, had the experience of hearing beautiful music in the night or while waking up, only to discover that it is a drunk arguing on the street, a child gently snoring, or a slurred clock radio… Is this a common experience? **Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com**

the UFO files

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UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES ON TIME TRAVEL, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS AND OTHER RIPPLES IN REALITY

TIMELESSNESS

Television seems to be loving the concept of time travel at the moment, and several new shows explore how reality changes if we interfere with the space-time continuum. The biggest budget entry is *Timeless*, in which a US government craft ferries a historian back to key moments of the past, such as Lincoln's assassination. Someone is changing the outcome of these events and (it turns out) altering reality as everyone else then perceives it. Only the time travellers are aware that our present world is being constantly reshaped in this way, and the rest of mankind thinks that the present in which they are living is the same one as before. The UK has taken a lighter approach, reviving the 1990s BBC sitcom *Goodnight Sweetheart*, where a man stumbles on a portal that lets him go back 54 years in time. Originally, he voyaged to war-torn London, but in the revival he starts off in 1962 (the series left him in 1945 when it was cancelled 17 years ago) and travels forward into the confusing future of 2016.

But just how closely does fiction match what 'really' happens during fortean incidents where witness perceptions of time and space confound our everyday impressions?

The idea for *Goodnight Sweetheart* was created after the writers heard about a true-life 'timeslip' case in which witnesses stumbled upon a gate into the past. I suspect this was the case of two couples from Kent, who, whilst travelling through the south of France by car in 1978, spent a night in an out of the way hotel they found near Avignon that seemed to exist 60 years in the past. The proximity of the town of Avignon (phonetically pronounced as 'having you on') has always stood out to me as a reason to be suspicious, though the witnesses have all stood by their story and assured me of its veracity when I met them; it would be very fortean for this remarkable time travel claim to involve a wickedly appropriate place name.

I have been fortunate enough to discuss this case with those involved several times. Most curiously, two of them volunteered to be hypnotised and taken back to the events by a doctor in Manchester to see what further insights might emerge. Whilst this experiment was not my idea it was done because a UFO researcher thought it possible that the 'time travel' memory was actually a cover story planted in the witnesses' minds to deflect attention away from an otherwise blocked alien abduction.

This idea is something that American UFO researchers have long argued over, and I have watched as several people were subjected to regression seeking out a 'missing' abduction that might be lurking behind otherwise non-UFO-related recall. One typical case involved a young woman who was travelling by car through Lancashire, heading back to Manchester after a day out in January 1981. Her conscious memory of what 'really' happened was of the usually very busy road suddenly becoming deathly quiet and the sounds around her muting as the car drove forward. This is the classic 'Oz Factor' experience, long recognised as a state of consciousness that seems to precede the onset of close encounters.

The witness then recalled a bright light that seemed to keep pace with her car during this 'silence', and how her vehicle started to behave erratically and then a strange, old-fashioned vehicle appeared out of nowhere, dangerously close. This 'apparition' distracted her mind from the UFO, but then suddenly 'vanished'. She tried to get help by swerving into a petrol station and kept pointing into the sky and babbling about what had happened to the man who was filling up her tank. But in a confused state she did not recall much else until arriving home feeling nauseous and lacking any memory of what seemed to be a large chunk of the evening. Her reality that night had been drastically altered.

It is easy to suspect hat there might be hidden memories here that could be teased out via hypnosis; but instead, what seemed to emerge in this case was a baffling set of images, highly unlikely to relate to a real event from that night, including a tall man in a white suit who led her to a room with a pool where a 'sick' dolphin was swimming towards her touch.

Regardless of which, if any, of these images are real or screens for something still hidden or plucked from a period of unconsciousness – or, indeed, something more exotic still – they do reveal the remarkably fluid nature of how people can experience reality during such an anomaly.

This is common during UFO close encounters. Think back to my recent *FT* series about police officer Alan Godfrey in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, who was stopped while driving his patrol car by a hovering 'UFO' over the road ahead (**FT325:27 et seq**). PC Godfrey's memories afterwards were a confusing mixture of what he was sure had really happened, what appeared to be flashbacks that might be real or might have emerged via dreams, and confusing imagery that popped into his head during subsequent regression hypnosis. In this case, they featured bizarre elements such as fitted carpets inside the UFO and a bearded alien, little Buck Rogers type robots and a large black dog as an alien pet. One finds disjointed elements such as these in too many alien contacts for them not to be significant, although they are hard to use in any meaningful objective narrative of the case.

As you can see, our evidence from abduction cases mirrors the time travel TV shows where reality morphs in confusing ways due to influences beyond our perception: mess with space-time and it wreaks havoc with the

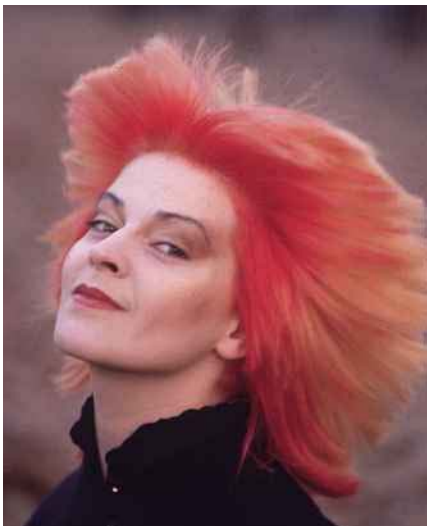
ABOVE: The US show *Timeless* is one of the recent television series to take up the theme of time travel.

continuity of present existence, and we scramble to make sense of the scattered fragments of reality and reconstruct the world in a linear way.

Interestingly, this pattern also appears in other areas of fortean study. A Mancunian called Phil told me of his experience in Portland Street, Manchester, in the summer of 1985. As an avid autograph hunter he met singer Toyah Wilcox, who agreed to sign his book; but as their eyes met he experienced that tell-tale sign of reality shifting as the Oz Factor struck. Phil told me how "the busy midday street scene disappeared and the noise around me faded and the traffic all vanished. Everything went hazy apart from Toyah's eyes." Suddenly, reality shifted changing the appearance of the singer as well as Phil's surroundings. Her renowned and rather extreme punk hairstyle and make-up disappeared, replaced by a surprisingly sedate style and colour. Phil blinked and after a few moments all returned to normal; perhaps it had been just a daydream or an hallucination. However, the 'new look' Toyah that Phil had seen did become part not just of his reality but also of the singer's when, soon after, she adopted just such a style after taking on more mainstream acting roles.

Another example of this shifting reality was described to me by the late actress Shirley Stelfox, who was well loved for her long-running role as Edna Birch in the ITV soap *Emmerdale*. In the 1980s she was married to actor Don Henderson who was the lead in several hit drama series and even had a role in *Star Wars*. They lived on a busy main road in Stratford-upon-Avon and parking outside was a constant headache. One Summer Saturday morning Don was driving their daughter to Brownies and, as was usual, Shirley took a chair and sat on the side of the road to await his return and preserve the parking spot. She did so alongside their neighbour, whose daughter was being driven to the same place by her own husband. After a pleasant chat in the sunshine the neighbour's husband drove up and parked but Don, driving right behind, slowed, and, instead of stopping, edged past a startled Shirley and accelerated away. As Shirley and her neighbours looked on in puzzlement they concluded that Don must have driven back to collect something he had left behind at the Brownie venue. As the two women stayed outside chatting and waiting for his return, the phone rang and Shirley rushed inside to find her husband at a call box asking in frustration why she had not kept their parking slot free. Despite her protestations that she was still doing so, even now, her husband insisted he had driven past because she had let a large white car park there instead. "There has never been a white car here. I have sat in this spot since you left," Shirley insisted. She had to get her neighbours to back her up on this, so adamant was Don that he'd had to go on a hunt for a parking spot because of the presence of the car he described, and only with their confirmation that there was no such vehicle did Don agree to return home.

A couple of hours later Shirley headed to a local store to get some groceries. The traffic was bad, as the popular tourist town was full of visitors. At the store Shirley noticed an elderly couple trying to cross the road between gaps in the traffic and was horrified to witness at close quarters the woman being struck a glancing blow by a car on her blindside, which sent her crashing to the floor. As someone called an ambulance Shirley went back into the shop to bring out a chair to let the badly shaken lady sit until help arrived. The chair she was given was just like the one she had sat in earlier, and was placed on the roadside just as hers had been as she had waited for her husband to drive home. The car that had struck the unfortunate pedestrian was parked right next to her now, awaiting the arrival of the police. It was a large white car, exactly like the one Don Henderson had 'seen' parked beside his wife that morning.



KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Toyah Wilcox and her memorable hairstyle.

"I really don't know what to make of all this," Shirley told me in one of our discussions. "It was truly extraordinary the way these things all blended together."

I have found that we UFO researchers often tend to find what we are seeking. We settle on some version of reality compatible with what we think should be the solution to the mystery: aliens or spaceships in one kind of case, timeslips and premonitions in others. But are we being seduced into anchoring anomalous things in our shifting reality because to us they seem familiar? Are we trying to create some sort – and sort – of order rather than face our own befuddlement in a reality that might not be as fixed as we'd thought? The problem is that if we are building our jigsaw based on what *we* decide is supposed to be the picture on the box, we are also creating – not just perceiving – the reality we see. We are building the universe in the image of our presumptions – perhaps even coaxing it down certain paths as we do so.

So how much more trustworthy is our conclusion that we have been abducted and examined by little aliens than a 'screen memory' of tending to a sick dolphin in a pool? Might we even have created an alien encounter out of the events in Stratford if, for some reason, we judged Don Henderson or Shirley Stelfox to have had their strange experience to block a UFO event?

The alien abduction scenario tends to be considered more 'real' as an explanation because it matches our collective theory based on past events. Yet those past events, and the whole abduction concept, began as a perception someone had that was, at the time, just as contrary to everyday reality as all the oddities we today dismiss as screen memories. Maybe we ought to be treating *all* of these shifting versions of reality as equal and not pre-selecting one that matches the outcome we hope to find; and perhaps we should extend this thinking into other fortean events and not just alien contact cases.

The hypnosis of the French timeslip witnesses changed no significant details, but it did add some interesting nuances about the feelings and sensations that they reportedly underwent. There was a sense of calm, rather like the Oz Factor, as well as a sense of heaviness and electrical energy tingling in the air – also common in close encounters. There was also a degree of 'reality contradiction' that teased the encounter away from what we might accept as everyday reality. We see this all the time in close encounters. Several witnesses even describe feeling in the aftermath as if they are ghosts trapped in a world of living people, trying to interact with reality but struggling to root themselves back in the universe they had left. In the French timeslip case the witnesses tried to use cameras to take pictures of the past, but these 'malfunctioned' and no photos resulted. In several UFO cases much the same has happened: witnesses claim to have taken the photo that they thought would change the world… but the image never comes out or just shows a dark sky with nothing alien to be seen.

In ufology we seek reasons to explain such misfortune: perhaps the aliens stopped the pictures from coming out and exposing their presence. But this seems needlessly complex and such anomalies could just be another way in which the reality we were living through whilst taking those photos is different from the one to which we ultimately return.

Something is causing fortean phenomena to happen, but we are not sure what. In fact, we are really just giving these phenomena labels that fit the cultural context of our era. Gods and fairies were once as credible a resolution to anomalous experiences as time travel and spacefaring aliens seem to a more modern age. But it is by no means a given that any of these things are the underlying cause: they are simply the topical pigeon holes that we choose to help us describe what is, more accurately, just an anomaly outside of our present comprehension.

The cause of these things could be a force of nature, an energy that warps our perceptions of the fabric of space/time, or another intelligence that flits between dimensions and by doing so alters our reality. Or there could be some other cause that lies far beyond the ken of even the brightest 21st century minds, because in order to unravel it we need 31st century knowledge. Just as the thinkers of ancient Greece could make guesses about things that from today's perspective seem remarkably prescient, they were still hamstrung by limited scientific understanding. We may be in a similar situation today. We do the best we can and try to find an interpretation that boxes up the problem in a way that we can live with. Quite possibly, this is just what witnesses are doing too: following our lead and interpreting reality-shifting paradigms through neat concepts that make some sense in terms of the culture of 2017.

So we may just be guessing, and like those ancient Greek philosophers some of our guesses will be wide of the mark while others will come to seem prescient. Either way, the process allows us to store the events in the attics of our lives and get on with the stuff that we *can* deal with day to day. Happily, we forteans glimpse the bigger picture through the pages of this monthly chronicle and grasp the real awe of what might be going on as it manifests around us as a carnival of absurdities.

66 WEIRDNESS ON WHEELS

THEO PAIJMANS fastens his seatbelt and goes in search of some road encounters of the strangest kind

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

Once, phantom hearses thundered along lonely moonlit roads. Headless horsemen galloped down country lanes and ghostly carriages materialised out of nowhere before vanishing again. "Specially baffling are some of the cases where a carriage, as well as human beings, has appeared", note the authors of *Phantasms of the Living*. A 'Major W' who lived near Conon Bridge, Ross-shire, related a particularly eerie example to them. The night of 23 August 1878 was still and dark. Around midnight, before retiring to his bed, the Major stepped out onto the porch to observe the weather. Suddenly, he saw coming round a turn in the drive a large, close carriage and a pair of horses with two men on the box. "It passed the front of the house, and was going at a rapid rate towards a path which leads to a stream… The carriage stopped abruptly when it came to the running water, turned, and in doing so, drove over the lawn… Neither of the men on the box had spoken and there was no sound from the inside of the carriage." The Major's son, who had now joined him, looked in and all he could see was "a stiff-looking figure sitting up in a corner, and draped, apparently, from head to foot in white." They were struck by the stillness of the men and the female figure that showed no signs of life. The carriage, which they did not recognise, drove away. The next morning they found no traces – "no marks of wheels or horses' feet on the soft grass or gravel road; and we never again heard of the carriage or its occupant…" [1]

> The next morning, they found no traces – "no marks of wheels or horses' feet on the soft grass or gravel road; and we never again heard of the carriage or its occupant..."

With the advent of the industrial age, a novel breed began to replace these spectral modes of transport. Cart gave way to car, carriage to bus and horse to motor. In the case of a haunted house in Charleston, South Carolina, the transition from old to new was observed at the very same spot. An unpleasant wraith had been plaguing the house since 1842: "Occupants for generations have told of hearing an equipage come charging down the lane, first accompanied by the sound of horses' hoofs, but now with the exhaust of an automobile engine", a newspaper reported a century later. [2]

Embedded in the canon of phantom carriage tales is a collection of puzzling stories that differ from the typical ghostly sighting formula. Some are so odd that the question arises: just what phenomena are

these descriptions attempting to depict?

One night in 1873 Thomas Inman and his son, returning home, were near the village of Taylorsville, Ohio. Suddenly they saw an intensely bright light descending rapidly towards the Earth with a loud, roaring noise. It struck the ground a short distance ahead. "The blazing object flickered and flared for a few moments and then faded into darkness, as a man dressed in a complete suit of black and carrying a lantern emerged from it. The man walked a few paces and stepped into a buggy, which had not been observed before by either Mr Inman or his son. There was no horse attached to this supernatural vehicle, but no sooner had the man taken his seat than it started to run, noiselessly but with great velocity, along the highway, and this it continued to do until it reached a deep gully, into which it plunged, when buggy, man and lantern suddenly disappeared as mysteriously as they came." [3]

For several nights in 1881, at a railroad junction in the neighbourhood of Lawrenceburg, Indiana, Joseph Slater encountered "a flaming light as long as a railroad car. Around it he saw several forms flitting with lanterns". It was said that several fatal railroad accidents had occurred there in the past. [4] A man identified only as Charles C briefly recounted how one night in 1884 in County Carlow, Ireland, he was passing a mansion when he saw "two men ride out of the carriage shed. They were sitting in a fire which carried them along to the graveyard, where they disappeared". [5]

The late 1920s and early 1930s mark a peak in reports of spectral cars, which were seen far and wide. A 'ghost automobile' was frequently encountered by night travellers approaching the notorious 'death curve' on the state highway near Lomo, California, in 1926. [6] In 1929 a ghost, "but a very modern one – in the shape of an old Ford car", frightened villagers of Roscommon in South Australia. The phantom Ford was ablaze with light and on one occasion, the villagers said, "phantom men and women got out of the car and danced through walls and hedges to the sound of weird music". [7] In 1930, Mr Stuart Rodger, the district coroner of Hyde, Cheshire, solemnly advanced the theory at an inquest that "a phantom motor-lorry had appeared at a haunted spot on a main road and caused a long list of accidents there during the past two years." [8]

In this wave, certain accounts stand out for their otherworldliness. One of these describes a very curious encounter that occurred in 1927 or 1928 on a road somewhere in England. A man was riding his motorcycle when he suddenly heard behind him the humming sound of a car. "Its lights were soon reflected on the road in front of me, and in a minute it was on me. I noticed as it passed that it was an ultra-modern type of motor coach travelling at high speed and swaying from side to side. It was filled with men, every one of whom was holding a match to a pipe. Seen through the glass sides and through the transparent panel in the back of the hood they looked weird in the flickering light of the matches. A little way ahead of me a policeman stepped into the road as if to stop the coach, which was certainly travelling at a remarkable speed. In a flash, however, it passed him and turned a bend in the road. Soon after I also turned this corner, and saw the motor coach, a blaze of light, some distance along the road. Then there was a flash, a loud explosion, and the road before me lay clear and deserted in the moonlight. The motor coach had vanished. I accelerated, thinking there had been some accident, and quickly reached the spot. There was no sign of the coach or its passengers and no disturbance of the road's surface. There were no side turnings and no trace of it having crashed into the rough common on either side of the road. I can advance no explanation of this extraordinary, but true, incident." [9]

Another 'blazing car' with eerie occupants terrorised the villagers of Athleague and Mount Talbot in Ireland: "Witnesses in the locality state that on many occasions about midnight a mysterious vehicle somewhat like a high-powered motor-car ablaze with lights dashes noiselessly through the roads. There is apparently no driver, but seated in the car are a number of white-robed figures. Walls, ditches, fields, and plantations present no obstacle to the car." [10]

Further back in time, we find occasional mentions of things that appear on roads exhibiting the characteristics of motorised vehicles but leaving the eyewitnesses perplexed as to the design or identity of the object. These are not, say, old Model T Fords or any other recognisable vehicles, but something quite different. In 1911, the citizens of West Springfield saw an extremely fast-moving ghostly automobile in different parts of town. The vehicle was "of unusual length and its colouring is pure white. The lights on the machine appeared to be feeble, and all that was seen was a flash of white as the automobile whirled past". [11] In 1917, residents of West Duluth, Minnesota, remembered the mysterious 'Phantom Sky Rider' that regularly flew over, sometimes with and sometimes without lights, because now they were perplexed by the visits of a 'Phantom Sled'. This vehicle was a long, low, motor sled painted white with a seat at the front, in which sat a man dressed entirely in white with the exception of a dark-coloured mask. Behind him was placed a motor and a propeller. Nightly, the strange vehicle sped through the town at speeds ranging from a few miles per hour to those associated with a high-power motorcar. It was suggested that the mysterious figure was an inventor testing a new motor. [12]

As to more recent sightings of similarly weird wheeled contraptions, speculation ranges from visitors from the future, [13] other dimensions or parallel planes of existence. These modern phantom car reports also fit comfortably in UFO-lore [14] with its Men In Black driving around in old yet brand-new looking cars. As it stands, stories of encounters with phantom vehicles belong to the folklore of our industrial culture. [15] Perhaps more attention should be directed to who is driving, rather than the vehicle itself, when a high strangeness road encounter occurs. Take the case of Mr and Mrs Snead. In 1911, the newlyweds were on their honeymoon and their car had run into a ditch near Medford, Oregon, and – as if it had been despatched just for this purpose – a mysterious car emerged on cue and out of nowhere: "Just at the proper moment another automobile drew up, bearing four men, all of solemn, unsmiling mien and dressed in black." It made such an impression on the married couple that Mrs Snead noted the strange encounter down in her diary: "They appeared just as if they had dropped from the heavens, in the very nick of time, and they acted just like four spooks; they never said a word, nor answered when spoken to; they just hopped out of their car, took hold of ours, boosted it out of the ditch, jumped back into their own, and were gone. We batted our eyes, and thought we might be dreaming…" [16]

NOTES

1 Edmund Gurney, Frederick Myers, Frank Podmore, *Phantasms Of The Living*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1918, pp481-482.

2 'Tale of Phantom Visitor Mystery After 100 years', *Hopewell Herald*, Hopewell, NJ, 14 Oct 1942.

3 'Very Like A Whale', *New York Herald*, New York, NY, 8 April 1873.

4 'Hoosier Goblins', *The Dallas Daily Herald*, Dallas, TX, 8 Jan 1881; *National Police Gazette*, New York, 22 Jan 1881.

5 'Ghosts In All parts Of The World', *Boston Post*, Boston, MA, 24 April 1921.

6 'Ghost Auto Explained By Sutter Farmer', *Woodland Daily Democrat*, Woodland, CA, 22 Oct 1926.

7 'Phantom Ford. Ghostly Motorists', *Observer*, Adelaide, SA, 2 Feb 1929.

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9 'There Was A Loud Explosion', *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, NSW, Australia, 17 Aug 1928 (citing the London *Express*).

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11 'Auto-Ghost Is New Sensation. West Springfield Walkers Wonder at Ubiquitous White Car', *Springfield Daily News*, Springfield, MA, 18 May 1911.

12 'Night Rider In Phantom Sleigh', *Duluth News Tribune*, Duluth, MI, 30 Jan 1917.

13 Peter Hassall, 'Motorists From The Future', *Fortean Times*, 241, Oct 2008.

14 Albert Rosales, *Cosmic Cars And Other Road Oddities*, privately published, 2012.

15 A novel approach is offered in the unfortunately short-lived BBC television series *The Living And The Dead*.

16 'Auto Trip Honeymoon', *Oregonian*, Portland, OR, 24 Sept 1911.

NOSEWITNESS

THE SMELL OF HIGH STRANGENESS

Research into strange phenomena has tended to concentrate on visual and audio data, but witness accounts of everything from UFO encounters to monster sightings often contain intriguing references to supernatural scents and paranormal pongs. **JOSHUA CUTCHIN** argues that it's time we took olfactory evidence for forteana seriously...

Ivete Clemência Felipe and her relatives encountered an unearthly stench near São Vicente, Brazil, one evening in 1978. The 23-year-old witness was alone in the home of her sister-in-law when she suddenly noticed a "little blue light in the sky quite far away." As it approached the house with frightening rapidity, the anomaly grew in size and began to strobe a startling array of colours.

"I could hear a buzzing sound," Felipe recalled. "It was going around and around. All the doors and windows were shut, but it lit up the inside of the house. I was so scared that I ran and hid under a bed."

Her cousin and sister-in-law, both of whom observed the object upon their return home, corroborated the event. A follow-up interview by members of the Belo Horizonte UFO group CICOANI and investigator Bob Pratt revealed that both women detected "a smell of gas, like sulphur" during the incident.[1]

• Five years earlier, the town of Murphysboro in southwest Illinois found itself under siege by a "7ft-[2m] tall mud-covered and light-haired man" dubbed the Big Muddy Monster.[2] The beast was renowned for its overpowering odour, which many townsfolk attributed to the river of its namesake. They speculated the beast was using the waterway as a transportation corridor.

One of the more famous encounters during the Big Muddy Monster flap took place on 26 June 1973. Witness Cheryl Rath (née Ray) was stargazing on her back porch when she and her boyfriend heard rustling in the nearby bushes. Upon investigating the noise, the couple was amazed to see a manlike creature Rath described as "real tall, hairy. I think it was white, but [the hair] was dirty, matted. It had a real bad odour.

LEFT: The 7-ft-tall and foul-smelling Big Muddy Monster of Murphysboro, Illinois, has been commemorated in a far more appealing local craft beer.

"THE HAIR WAS MATTED... IT HAD A REAL BAD ODOUR"

It was really rank. I never smelled anything like it."

After a few moments, the Big Muddy Monster simply turned and walked away. When asked later about the overpowering stink, Creath agreed with the common opinion that it was due to a layer of "river slime" covering the beast. Other witnesses over the years would describe the smell as rotten or sewage-like.

• The Battle of Bentonville took place between 19 and 21 March 1865 in North Carolina, marking the final clash between Union Major General William Tecumsah Sherman and Confederate General Joseph E Johnston. Johnston's subsequent defeat, coupled with the April surrender of Confederate General Robert E Lee, effectively marked the end of the War Between the States.

As the largest Civil War battle in the Old North State, the site of the Battle of Bentonville has been preserved as a state park. Today, it welcomes thousands of history aficionados coming to pay their respects or relive the past – quite vividly, on occasion. According to author Christopher K Coleman, a man whose farm bordered the historical park was busily cutting wood in March 1990 when he found himself surrounded by the sounds and smells of battle, as though he had been transported 125 years back in time. Startled, he dropped his chainsaw and fell beside it on the ground, terrified by the sensation of bullets and artillery audibly passing over him. Swirling smoke appeared and "the acrid smell of gunpowder" filled the air, adding to his terror.

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID NEWTON

THE PRINT COLLECTOR / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: In March 1990, a man whose farm bordered the site of the Civil War battle of Bentonville suddenly experienced some kind of timeslip anomaly in which not the sights but the sounds and smells of the 1865 battle, including the "acrid" odour of gunpowder, appeared to be all around him.

The entire occurrence stopped just as abruptly as it had begun, as if a switch had been flipped. The witness fled, his chainsaw remaining where it had fallen for weeks before he summoned the courage to retrieve it. [3]

THE NOSE KNOWS

If "seeing is believing", then smelling is trusting; for, as the adages go, "the nose knows" when something "fails to pass the smell test". "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," wrote the Bard, and it is for this reason that scent is often regarded as something of an intuitive sense, able to parse the true nature of things even when deception occludes truth. Thus, it should come as little surprise that forteana has its reality reinforced when accompanied by odours, as the gullible eye is more easily fooled than the sceptical nose.

The three contemporary examples above are a mere handful of the cases detailing scents in conjunction with the supernatural. On some level, it isn't particularly surprising that encounters with the unknown are accompanied by specific odours – lots of experiences have closely associated smells, from visits to the hospital to walking into a humidor – and it wouldn't be at all rude to question why we should even bother looking into this niche subject in greater detail.

But, as CS Lewis once wrote of the fairy folk: "If I may risk the oxymoron, their unimportance is their importance." [4]

Smells seem quite inconsequential upon cursory examination, a mere by-product, an afterthought to bigger, much grander, events. Upon examining the literature, however, certain patterns take shape, some more immediately apparent than others; and, if consistent odour trends between various paranormal encounters can be established, it certainly implies a deeper meaning to their appearance in eyewitness (nosewitness?) testimony.

Those collecting data on esoterica have long noted the consistency of supernatural odours. Over the course of his career as a paranormal writer, the late John Keel paid a great deal of attention to the consistency of smells in his investigations, dedicating space in several of his books to his observations.

"With the exception of the European stories and some of those reports from Canada, it seems that the majority of these creatures are accompanied by a pungent, very unpleasant odour," he wrote of hairy hominids in *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings*. "This stink seems to exceed normal animal smells and could, eventually, offer some kind of clue to the body chemistry of the creatures."[5]

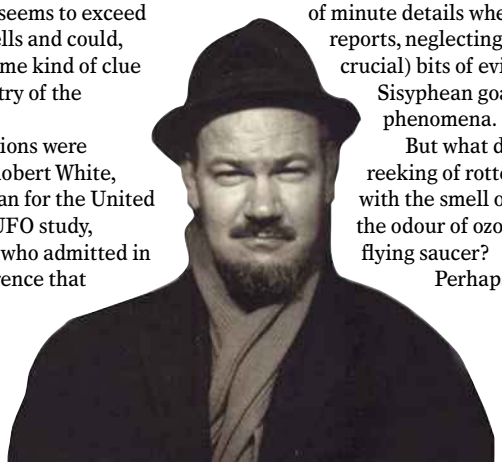
Similar observations were made by Captain Robert White, Pentagon spokesman for the United States Air Force's UFO study, Project Blue Book, who admitted in a 1955 press conference that the most common "ufonauts" reported to the USAF were the "little, green, luminous, smelly types". [6] In *The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits*, researcher Rosemary Ellen Guiley wrote that "distinctive, unusual, and out-of-place odours are one of the most common phenomena associated with hauntings," often appearing foul in poltergeist and demonic cases. [7]

If John Keel, a Pentagon spokesman, and Rosemary Ellen Guiley feel paranormal smells are worth noting, then perhaps we should pay attention – they are neither uninformed nor alone in noticing the prominence of odours in strange and unusual cases. Perhaps this line of research is worth pursuing.

If we are truly dedicated to deciphering the nature of all things unexplained, it behoves us to scrutinise every possible aspect of these encounters. No stone is too small to leave unturned, yet many ghost hunters, ufologists, and Sasquatch seekers frustratingly gloss over the importance of minute details when preparing their reports, neglecting these (possibly crucial) bits of evidence in favour of the Sisyphean goal of "proving" such phenomena.

But what does a Sasquatch reeking of rotten eggs have to do with the smell of a ghostly cigar, or the odour of ozone accompanying a flying saucer?

Perhaps UFOs are



extraterrestrials in nuts-and-bolts craft, ghosts are the spirits of the deceased, and Sasquatch is a flesh-and-blood giant ape. Perhaps they aren't. Lines blur and cross with uncomfortable irregularity: visitations from Venusians are occasionally nigh indistinguishable from visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM); Sasquatch can appear alongside a UFO; fairies consort with the spirits of the deceased.

It would be easy to interpret this catchall approach as a tacit declaration that all paranormal *phenomena* are merely multiple faces of a singular *phenomenon*. Although this is a possibility, the reader is invited to consider whether these different phenomena merely utilise similar methods (e.g. though fairies, angels, and aliens are presaged by a bright light, this doesn't necessarily mean the entities are one-and-the-same – perhaps it only means that their modes of manifestation are the same, or that our limited senses perceive them similarly). The patterns in paranormal smells may only indicate commonalities, not the substructure of some underlying pan-supernatural theory. Ergo, it may be more useful to think of our approach as less of a pie chart and more of a Venn diagram.

SMELLING THE UNKNOWN

The nose is nature's chemical receptor. It categorises the unseen, allowing us to "identify friend, foe, or quarry, and further differentiate between edible and nonedible foods", in the words of environmental engineering professor Paul N Cheremisinoff. The affect may be unconscious, like subtle arousals when smelling the opposite sex, or it may be overt, as when the scent of smoke alerts us to fire. It isn't until we are faced with the terrifying notion of dangerous, odourless substances like carbon monoxide that we fully appreciate olfaction's alerting power.

Alarming smells may well be our first indicator of the unexplained. In November 1999, a semi truck driver near Holtville, California, pulled off the road to relieve himself around 10pm. He immediately noted a "strong dead decaying skunk smell" and left his headlights on to avoid stepping in anything unpleasant. The witness had just reached the vehicle's passenger side when the stench intensified to "a gagging type of a smell". At that instant, something with long hair and a large frame rushed down the mountainside, grunting as it passed through his headlights and across the road.

The panicked driver vacated the area immediately. [8]

MIASMAS AND MEDICINE

In 1929, neurologist Sigmund Freud published *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a seminal work highlighting the inherent tension between the individual's desire for independence and civilisation's need to impose order. In his classic fashion, Freud posited that one of the main sources of this friction was mankind's primitive sexual drives, further speculating that the diminished role of smell in modern man was thanks to evolution: as human ancestors assumed an upright position, noses lifted farther from the fragrant ground, allowing smell to take a backseat to vision. Sexually stimulating odours were surpassed in favour of visual arousal – olfaction was, to Freud's mind, a base, animalistic sense.

Millennia before *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Plato laid the groundwork for Freud's theory, declaring the eye and ear superior organs to the nose; to the Greek philosopher, vision and hearing, which allowed mankind to appreciate geometry and music, were "noble" senses. [9] Plato cited the source of smell's shortcomings as inferiorities in the nose's "veins", too narrow to accommodate the "particles" of water and earth, too wide for those of air and fire. [10]

Aristotle elaborated on the notion in his short treatise *Sense and Sensibilia*, pointing out the inferiority of olfaction in mankind as compared to beasts. He placed smell between the tactile senses of touch/taste and the medium-delivered senses of sight/hearing – it was the most liminal of all senses, generated neither within nor without.

While both Plato and Aristotle wrote extensively on the subject, smell received scant philosophical attention until the Christian era. Though the Old Testament unabashedly relishes smell – the Song of Solomon is replete with positive olfactory imagery – the New Testament seems less tolerant. In the latter half of the Bible "we continually sense a veiled criticism of the profane use of scent," wrote historical anthropologist Annick Le Guérer, citing Judas's objections when Mary fragrantly anointed the feet of Christ. [11]

Early Church officials, who condemned all Earthly delights, adopted this aversion. Even though it sought to upset the status quo of thought, the Age of Enlightenment continued to degrade olfaction, which it held could lead the intellect astray. It wasn't until the 18th and 19th centuries, with the renewed interest in medicine, that smell came to the forefront of scholarly attention. [12]

Misguided doctors and researchers determined that diseases were caused by foul smells, or *miasmas*. The idea was by no means new – ancient India had its own version, while second century physician and philosopher Galen of Pergamon had pioneered the concept in the West (as early as the 1300s scholars attributed the Plague to a "deadly corruption of the air"). Nor was the notion restricted to the Old World: the native people of upstate New York held that around 700 BC, a horned serpent rose from the depths of Lake Ontario, spreading disease and killing by the score with its foul breath. [13]

In short, smells were ascribed supernatural powers. Hateful beliefs from mediæval Christianity re-emerged in popular culture, where "menstrual blood, the Devil and Jews, for example, were all believed to have a distinctive smell, thus sneakily invading the Christian male through his nostrils." [14] During the alleged four-year possession of Ursuline nuns known as the Loudun Possessions of 1630, the scent of "a bouquet of musk roses" was blamed for allowing Satan access to the

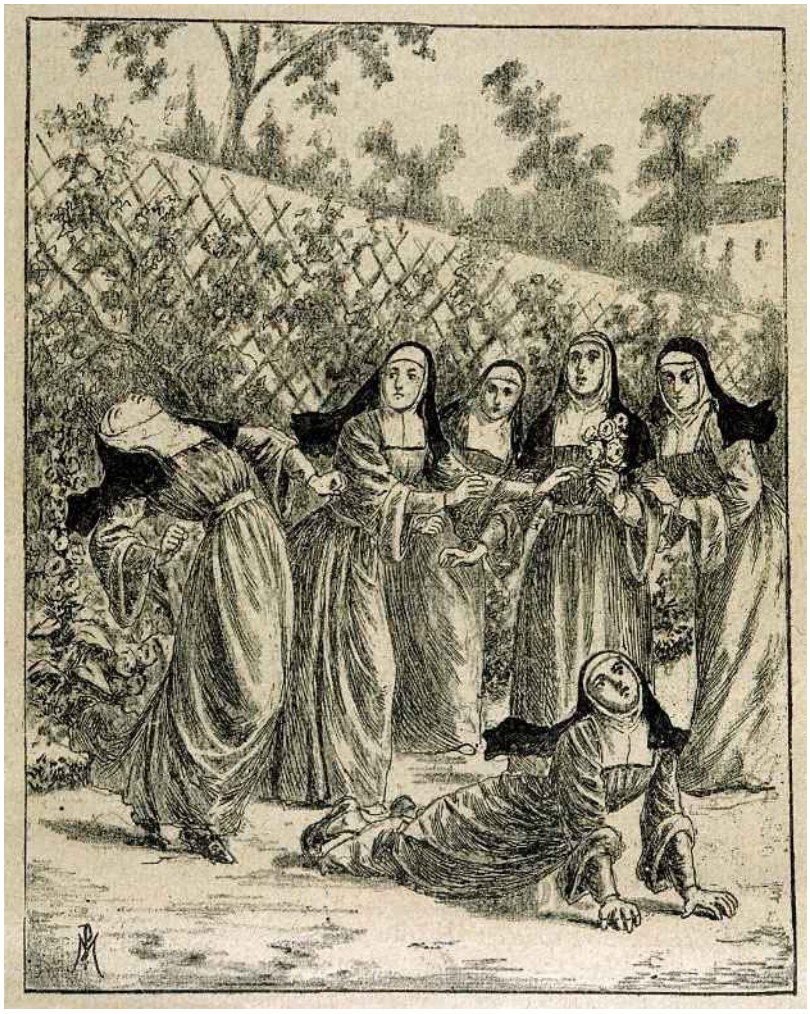
> "THIS STINK SEEMS TO EXCEED NORMAL ANIMAL SMELLS"

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The USAF Project Blue Book team; apparently the commonest type of UFO occupant reported was "little, green, luminous" and "smelly". **OPPOSITE:** John Keel was one fortean researcher who paid attention to smells.

sisters (the events were likely exaggerated by the Church).[15] By the 1800s, European miasmatic beliefs were so widespread that fires were lit to cleanse the air during times of pestilence, jars of bodily odours were collected for examination, and – naturally – pleasant smells were ascribed positive, curative effects, a notion that survives in modern aromatherapy practice.

Eventually, miasma theory gave way to modern concepts of germs and viruses, and the study of smell evolved into a scientific examination of olfaction. In the modern era, the Mad Gasser of Mattoon and the Flatwoods Monster would illustrate that the key conceits of miasma theory were not entirely without basis. Smells can, in some sense, harm the smeller.



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LEFT: A bouquet of roses allows Satan to possess the Ursuline sisters of Loudun.

THE SCIENCE OF SMELLS

When we smell, scent molecules bind to specific sensory cells high in our nose; this interaction has been described as a sort of key-lock configuration, with each cell corresponding to specific molecules. If a "key" (molecule) and "lock" (cell) are compatible, the ensuing stimulation is eventually relayed to the olfactory bulb, a neural structure in the brain. Once here, this stimulation fires electrical impulses at the amygdala, a neuron cluster that serves as the hub for memory, emotions, and decision-making. This complex brain-body interaction links directly with the limbic system, a series of nerves and networks governing visceral and behavioural reactions. Olfaction is the first sense to become dominant in infants – the entire nervous system is affected by odours, from our pulse and breathing to more complex digestive, sexual, and emotional responses. Smell's deep, reflexive triggers regularly cause paranormal witnesses to experience physical reactions. Reports of nausea and dizziness are among the most common effects attributed to smells and the unknown.

- Two luminous fireballs landed in the cow pasture of a pregnant housewife in Bowling Green, Missouri, one summer evening in July 1972. The event was accompanied by a nauseating stench of decomposition and strange, unearthly grunts and screams.[16]

- Russian city leader VA Ivanov returned abruptly after disappearing for 11 months in 1987. Ivanov claimed that he had been returning home when, on a whim, he stopped by a favourite childhood haunt, a gully near the River Irtysh. Dipping his hand to the water for a drink, he noticed an unpleasant dizzying odour. Ivanov immediately feared asphyxiation and tried to claw his way out of the gully but was paralysed. After blacking out, he awoke in a surreal, tropical location, complete with pink sky and unrecognisable wildlife. Ivanov claimed that when he tried to move again, he suddenly found himself back in Russia. The entire experience, to his estimation, had taken no more than a few hours. Ivanov was purportedly of sound mental health, and some reports claimed the soil samples taken from his boots were not native to the area.[17]

- Chilean citizen Cariaga Gonzales noticed a large, monkey-like animal by the side of the road the evening of 24 June 2000. When he stepped out of the vehicle to investigate, he was nauseated by a strong smell. "It's something similar to a decomposing animal," he said later. Gonzales came within 25ft (7.6m) before a blood-curdling howl forced him to flee.[18]

Was it the sound that made Gonzales flee, or the smell? Studies have shown time and again that human beings are highly susceptible to scent manipulation. For example, the aroma of cleaning products can make people more honest and fair in business dealings. Foul smells have an even greater impact. In October 2010, New York governor hopeful Carl Paladino trounced his rival in the Republican primary by issuing flyers infused with the smell of rotting garbage that read "end the stink of corruption in Albany."[19]

"Unconsciously influenced by a smell, we may be prompted to do or avoid doing or feeling something without fully understanding why," wrote Dutch psychologist Piet Vroon.[20] Odours can even influence the character of dreams – in one study, dreamers exposed to rose scent (phenyl ethyl alcohol) had more pleasant dreams than those exposed to the scent of rotten eggs (hydrogen sulphide).[21]

Despite its importance and ability to viscerally impact us, olfaction remains largely under-researched and poorly understood. Science still lacks a consensus opinion on exactly how the key-lock system of odour coding and perception functions; some posit that molecular shape determines which cells react, while others have begun to invoke more controversial theories including quantum effects.

A key concept in olfactory science is that of hedonics. Hedonics describe the pleasant or unpleasant nature of a smell. Though some might assume that universal hedonic values are present in every human from birth (e.g. garbage smells bad, bacon smells good), the truth of the matter is that specific odours are only perceived as pleasant/unpleasant because they possess corresponding learned associations. To the garbage man, trash smells of money, but to a vegan, bacon smells of death (in an exception to this rule, research indicates that unknown odours are generally less likely to be deemed pleasant).[22] This factor is one of the main reasons for the inability of the United States military to create a universal stink bomb; with few exceptions, a representative sample of the world's ethnic groups cannot agree upon a consistently revolting odour.

This same associative logic extends to encounters with the unknown: generally speaking, benevolent entities – BVMs, angels, female ghosts, Adamski-style space brothers – smell pleasant, while malevolent beings like devils, demons, and Grey aliens smell unpleasant. These hedonic associations extend to near-death experiences (NDEs) as well. Pope Gregory wrote in the sixth century

of a soldier who had died and returned, but not before seeing the intersection of Heaven and Hell: "He said that there was a bridge, under which ran a black, gloomy river which breathed forth an intolerably foul-smelling vapour. But across the bridge there were delightful meadows carpeted with green grass and sweet-smelling flowers. The meadows seemed to be meeting places for people clothed in white. Such a pleasant odour filled the air that the sweet smell by itself was enough to satisfy the hunger of the inhabitants who were strolling there". [23]

Mystics have long spoken of odours of sanctity, and today the hedonic associations of Heaven and Hell remain engrained in culture. One NDE collected by psychologist Margot Grey told of a survivor who, after attempting suicide, was suddenly "in a place that I can only describe as Dante's *Inferno*. I saw a lot of other people who seemed grey and dreary and there was a musty smell of decay." [24]

Scientists steeped in the materialist paradigm have long sought to write off NDEs as last-minute misfirings within the brain. The appearance of uncommon odours would not be out of place in such explanations, as there are a variety of olfactory disorders, mostly of neurological origin. *Anosmia* is the inability to smell; *dysosmia,* a distortion of smell; *cacosmia,* the unpleasant interpretation of pleasant smells. Not inconsequential to our discussion is *phantosmia*, the hallucination of odours in the absence of noticeable smells. These phantom scents are often unpleasant (cacosmic) and are frequently caused by brain damage or seizures in the temporal lobe. As such they are common in schizophrenics and those suffering from brain tumours.

It is imperative to understand that phantosmia does *not* refer to spirit smells. Unfortunately, some paranormal researchers have begun erroneously using the term to describe any odour without a source, particularly in haunted locations. The difference is simple: phantosmia generates odours detected only by an individual, while several witnesses can notice spirit smells. By definition, phantosmia is a neurologically generated medical condition that is entirely internal. It is individual-based and not location-based, though it may provide an explanation for odours in single-witness sightings and accounts of clairscent (psychic smells).

It is possible for the power of suggestion to create imagined scents. In one such example, painter and Holocaust survivor Avigdor Arikha, upon reopening his old concentration camp sketchbook, was hit with the overpowering stench of corpses. Those around him denied the stench.

"Did he actually experience the odour of the concentration camp," wrote odour psychologist Trygg Engen, "or, rather, the memory of a terrible situation associated with an odour?" [25]

IVANOV NOTICED AN UNPLEASANT DIZZYING ODOUR AND FEARED ASPHYXIATION

MEMORY AND LANGUAGE

Benjamin Davidson was travelling from Portsmouth, Ohio, to Cincinnati on a spring evening in the mid-1960s when he was forced to a halt. In the middle of the road sat an elliptical metallic craft, flashing a dazzling array of multi-coloured lights. Despite this startling scenario, he remained calm as several tall, praying mantis-like beings escorted him from his vehicle to the waiting structure.

Once inside the well-lit interior, he allegedly met 20 of the creatures, which placed him on a table and began examining him. They performed a variety of procedures, including scraping skin from his hands, clipping his fingernails, and extracting blood. Most chillingly, he noticed the body of a dead girl on an adjacent table. "I know she was dead," he later said. "I didn't know who she was or where she came from, but it was quite obvious that she was dead."

He reappeared several hours later at a traffic light near Portsmouth before returning home to a very upset and suspicious wife. He claimed no recollection of the event until, while smoking at his kitchen table in the early 1990s, his cigarette singed the hair of his arm. The odour of burnt hair brought back memories of the unwelcome medical examination he had repressed for nearly three decades. [26]

Few senses have a more profound effect upon memory than smell. Any adult who has experienced a fragrance from childhood is

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ABOVE: The exhumed body of Saint Padre Pio lies in the Catholic church of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, Rome, in 2016. Like many saints, Padre Pio was associated with the 'odour of sanctity' and it was said that the blood issuing from his stigmata gave off the scent of flowers.

well aware of the tight coupling between scent and memory, and it is not at all uncommon to have memories flood back, unbidden, on catching a nostalgic whiff. Memories of odours are persistent and permanent, especially when the associated event is particularly significant to our lives. British veterinarian James Herriot, who served in the Royal Air Force, used a popular soap in the shower the first night of his service; the day's events, which included medical examinations, ornery corporals, and saying goodbye to his wife, made him unable to use the soap again the rest of his life. [27]

"It is actually better to think of this ability in terms of not forgetting rather than remembering," writes Engen. "While visual and auditory memory usually decrease with time, often exponentially in light of new experiences, odour memory remains intact." In many cases this recall is a primitive, protective act, designed to safeguard us against repeating unpleasant encounters of the past. Not only does scent memory fail to diminish, but it is also impervious to *retroactive interference*, the tendency for newer memories to overwrite and mix with older recollections. Notably, Alzheimer's patients show a severe impairment in odour memory.

So why is our sense of smell – in actuality, robust and powerful, inviolable in memory – so often overlooked and taken for granted? The confounding element masking the power of human olfaction lies not in our physiology or psychology but rather, unsurprisingly, in our language. Olfactory researchers playfully call this the "tip-of-the-nose" phenomenon, a riff on the phrase "tip-of-the-tongue"; like a word on the tip of our tongue, we can recognise odours and yet have their names elude us. On average, we experience this once out of every 10 scents we perceive. This occurrence is compounded by the difficulty of identifying odours in the absence of context clues. Our language actively affects the way we perceive smells: unknown odours are more likely to be perceived as negative, while any smell that can be named will actually be perceived more sharply.

The difficulties of language are endemic in the descriptions provided by paranormal witnesses, as odours are described in equal parts "strange, foul, or unpleasant." In his unparalleled two-volume work *UFO Abductions: The Measure of a Mystery,* Thomas Bullard lists smells that are "sharp-smelling, sickly, burning," or, even more frustratingly, "strange" or "odd".

A good example of such nebulous descriptions comes from "Jane", one of the abductees studied by the late Karla Turner. On 2 December 1992, she noticed an "unrecognisable odour" in the air of her home: "'acrid, strong, heavy, sharp, pungent, and tangy,' unrelated to food or smoke odours, and unlike anything she'd ever smelled." That evening she witnessed a UFO, and was taken early the following morning. [28]

ODOUR AND THE OCCULT

The role of scents in occult rituals can be traced back to prehistoric sacrificial rites. Ancient faiths worldwide embraced the concept of burnt offerings, wherein a sacrifice – exclusively an animal in Abrahamic religions, occasionally a human in pagan ceremonies – was burned as an offering to supernatural forces. Being invisible, these deities found solid food unfit for consumption and thus relied upon fire to release the essence of the food, changing the tangible into the ethereal. (These concepts, studied in depth in my book *A Trojan Feast*, are echoed in the Celtic faerie faith, wherein earth elementals consume not the physical food, but rather its essence, or *foyson*. See **FT332:45**) When the ritual was complete, the burnt husk would remain, but the essence itself had risen to the Heavens in the form of smoke. Naturally, the odour of the smoke and the offering itself were conflated.

Even older religious rites used incense to similar effect. The ancient Egyptians used perfumed smoke not only to please the gods, but also for pragmatic purposes like removing odours, a practice mirrored in Babylon and later Greece and Rome, where incense was used while praying to divining oracles. In some sense, the burning of incense is a variation on the burnt offering writ small; it is the immolation of plants instead of flesh, essential oils combusting in the place of blood and fat.

The Christian church adopted the use of incense in mediæval times, though not without criticism – smell, as it has been noted, was viewed suspiciously. Again, the decision was partly spiritual and partly practical, as the smoke no doubt helped to alleviate the smell of dozens of unwashed congregants crammed in for Mass.

The ability of scent to transcend the physical plane naturally appealed to those dabbling in magic. Occult communities seized upon this attribute along with the entrenched hedonic qualities of odour: the rituals for fell deeds required foul scents, while conjuration for a positive outcome demanded pleasant perfumes.

The purpose of incense in magic was two-fold, not only carrying prayers to the Heavens but also focusing the mind of the magician and providing an atmosphere conducive to their goals. We can see similar thematic parallels in modern psychedelic use, which emphasises how set and setting – the user's state-of-mind and surrounding environment – are as important to the experience as the substance

NIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE / UIG VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A priest stands before the altar of burnt offering, on which a ram's head is consumed by flames.

ARIF ALI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

DALIBOR DANILOVIC / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Burning incense at the shrine of a Sufi saint in Pakistan. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Garlic, with its pungent odour, was traditionally employed to ward off vampires.

itself.

"Present-day writing on astral magic also emphasises perfumes," writes Le Guérer. "According to one theory, odours created by the volatilisation of particles of matter emit vibrations that have a profound effect on the behaviour of all living creatures and on one's astral twin." These "vibrations" – conceptually familiar to anyone with any experience in the New Age community – supposedly reinforce the natural abilities provided to us by our zodiacal sign. [29]

Such techniques extend to the summoning of demons and familiars in witchcraft. Conversely, smells have long been used to repel supernatural entities. Popular culture tells how vampires are repelled by garlic (a curious bit of folklore when compared to garlic's newfound popularity as a "superfood" to repel harmful health problems), and it is not uncommon to find modern wiccans, demonologists, and ghost hunters participating in "smudging" ceremonies, using burned sage to cleanse an area of evil spirits. Lesser known is the purported ability of saffron oil and henna to repel the Arabic *djinn*, [30] that the odour of pomade frightens Japan's *kuchi-sake-onna*, [31] or the fact that *duendes*, South America's fairy folk, cannot abide the odour of "culantro," the regional term for the herb *Eryngium foetidum*. [32]

Olfcation occupies an integral place in our psychology and perception of the world around us, worthy of the attention of anyone interested in the unexplained; for, when taken in aggregate, all existing research points to olfaction as a sense ripe for exploitation by occult forces.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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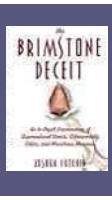

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BLACK TIDE

WAS FREUD AFRAID OF THE OCCULT?

Sigmund Freud's new 'science' of psychoanalysis was meant to shine a wholly materialistic light on the mysteries of the human mind and banish the supernatural forever. But, asks **GARY LACHMAN**, was Freud secretly troubled by the strange phenomena he publicly disavowed? And what about Jung and the case of the poltergeist in the bookcase?

Was Freud afraid of the occult? That the father of psychoanalysis took a no-nonsense, scientific approach to the mysteries of the human mind is a common view, and it suggests that while Freud dismissed the occult as a load of superstitious rubbish, he wasn't particularly afraid of it. Yet an episode in his relationship with his erstwhile successor Carl Jung may suggest otherwise. We can call it "the curious incident of the poltergeist in Freud's bookcase."

During a visit to Vienna in 1909, Jung had a conversation with Freud about the new study of parapsychology. Freud dismissed the whole subject as nonsense, something Jung, who had had ample experience of it, could not accept. As the conversation grew heated, Jung, who wanted to keep relations with Freud cordial, found it difficult to hold back his feelings. After all, he had been chosen by Freud to inherit his throne, and he had great respect, even love, for his mentor. But Jung also had his own genius and ambitions and found it difficult to toe the party line. Now, as he looked at Freud he felt his diaphragm glow, as if it were becoming red-hot. Suddenly a loud bang exploded in Freud's bookcase, and both men jumped up, afraid it would fall on them. Jung said to Freud: "There, that is an example of a so-called catalytic exteriorisation phenomenon," Jung's long-winded circumlocution for a poltergeist or "noisy spirit". Freud retorted "Bosh!" Jung shook his head and predicted that another bang would soon follow. When it did, Freud looked at Jung "aghast", and from that moment on was mistrustful of his previously favoured disciple. Jung said the way Freud looked at him it was "as if I had done something against him".

Not long after this, again in Vienna,

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A LOUD BANG EXPLODED IN FREUD'S BOOKCASE

ABOVE: Freud's study in Vienna, around 1905. Was a poltergeist lurking in the bookcase? **FACING PAGE:** Sigmund Freud photographed in 1935.

Jung once more visited Freud, and he later recalled a peculiar conversation they had during which Freud asked Jung to promise that he would never abandon the sexual theory of the origin of neurosis. Freud told Jung that they must make "a dogma of it, an unshakeable bulwark". Jung said that Freud spoke in the tones in which a

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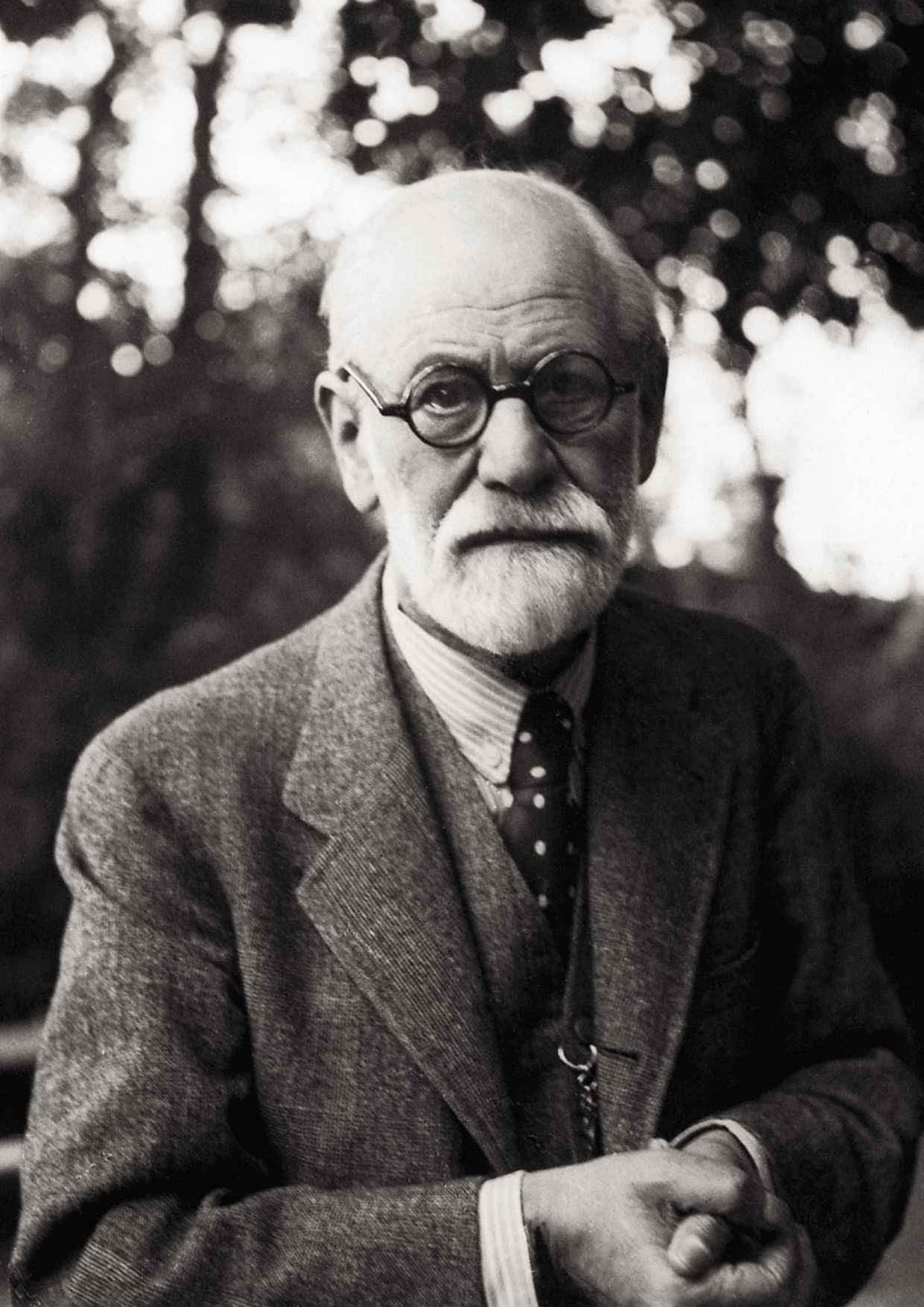
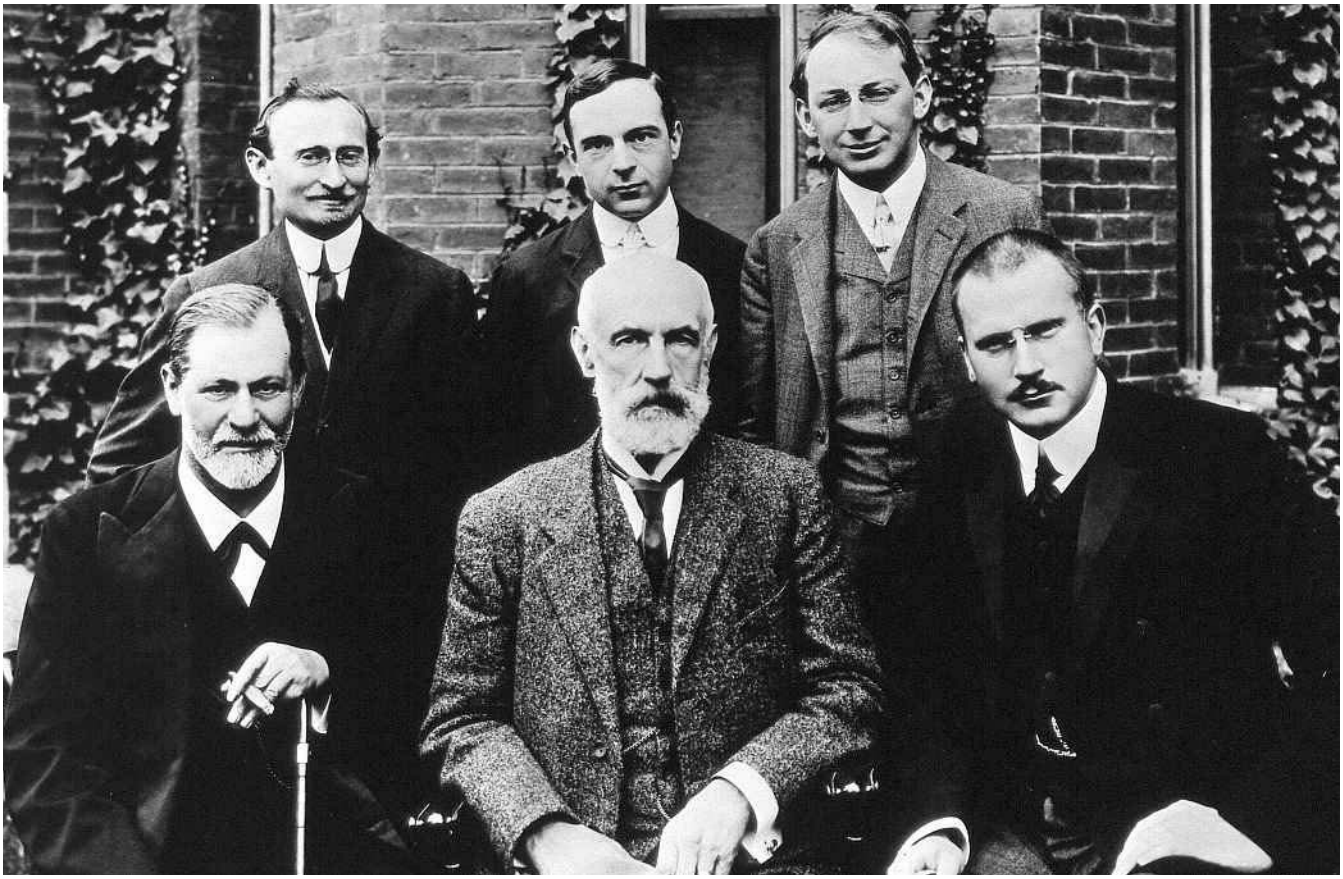




LEFT: Sigmund Freud (front row, left) and Carl Gustav Jung (front row, right) at a conference at Clark University, Massachusetts, in 1909, with Abraham Brill, Stanley Hall, Ernest Jones and Sandor Ferenczi. Not long after this the relationship between Freud and Jung, his chosen successor, would break down irretrievably.

father would ask his son to promise that he would go to church every Sunday. When Jung asked Freud why they had to affirm the sexual theory so vigorously, and against what they had to make it a bulwark, Freud replied: "Against the black tide of mud of occultism." By this time Jung knew that he could never assert the sexual theory with the same finality that Freud did. He already had reservations about it, but had kept them to himself. This request to collaborate with him on erecting a dogma was a sign that these reservations would soon have to come out. As we know, they did (see **FT171:46**; **264:40-45**).

JUNG'S SPOOKERY

Jung had grown up with the occult. As his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* shows, his family was steeped in it. His mother, grandmother, and other relatives attended séances regularly. Jung himself attended many, drawing from them the material for his doctoral dissertation, *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena*. Jung's mother went into trance states and spoke in strange voices and his cousin frequently "channelled" departed relatives. Jung himself experienced a period of "split personality", in which as an adolescent he would find his psyche being taken over by what he called Personality No 2, an austere masterful older gentleman of the 18th century.

Throughout much of his career Jung played his occult cards close to his chest and minimised his public appreciation of it. It was only in his last decades that he came out of the occult closet, as it were, and spoke openly about astrology, alchemy, spirits, synchronicity, and other occult or mystical subjects now associated with him. Yet those who knew him also knew that occult phenomena tended to happen around him. Visitors to his hideaway at Bollingen remarked that when Jung was deep in thought, the pots and pans would rattle, and at his home in Küsnacht, the furniture and woodwork would creak, evidence of what one guest called his "exteriorised libido". There is every reason to believe that when Jung tells us his diaphragm got red-hot, with the inference that it then somehow *caused* the bang in Freud's bookcase, he is telling the truth.

IT WAS IN HIS LAST DECADES THAT JUNG CAME OUT OF THE OCCULT CLOSET

Freud, at least, thought so. At the time of the poltergeist in his bookcase, Freud admitted to being strangely moved by the experience and there is reason to believe that he felt that Jung had somehow made it happen. This was perhaps why he looked at Jung "aghast" and took the "catalytic exteriorisation phenomenon" personally. Yet after Jung returned to Switzerland, Freud soon reverted to type. He quickly reduced Jung's "exteriorised libido" to simple imagination. In a letter to Jung, Freud explained that "the phenomenon was soon deprived of all significance for me" and his "readiness to believe vanished along with *the spell of your personal presence* [my italics]." While Jung was there, the sceptical, hard-nosed Freud was somehow moved enough to accept that Jung could have been right. But with Jung gone, Freud snapped out of it, and got to work explaining the incident in purely rational terms.

Freud's emotional investment in Jung as his chosen successor may have accounted for the mistrust he began to feel toward Jung after the incident. It may also explain why Freud asked Jung to take, in effect, a loyalty oath. But was there more than this? Did Freud mistrust Jung because he recognised that he somehow possessed the kinds of powers that Freud so easily dismissed? Without his presence, Jung's "mana" faded, and Freud could easily convince himself that nothing had happened. But with Jung around this was not so easy.

Jung replied to Freud's letter, apologising

for his "spookery," yet at the same time he affirmed it as an expression of what he called a "special complex" associated with the "prospective tendencies in man"; he spoke about this in a way that seems to presage his later ideas about synchronicity or "meaningful coincidence". Jung also told Freud that his "spookery" helped him get rid of a father complex he had toward Freud. He then goes on to talk about the "objective effect of the prospective tendency", by which he means its ability to arrange events in the outside world. If for "objective effect of the prospective tendency" we read "the mind" – which in plain English is what Jung means – we are talking about something occult indeed. Jung is saying that somehow, the human mind can arrange events in the outside world. Next to precognition, this has to be one of the strangest of all occult phenomena.

AGAINST THE OCCULT

Freud himself had an experience of this – and it was precisely about this that he felt the strongest resistance.

Freud had an upbringing very different from Jung's and his attitude toward the supernatural was also very different. Although, as mentioned, Jung was circumspect about his occult interests throughout much of his career, he finally did speak openly about it, and in his last decades he became a very vocal advocate of various occult ideas. More than anyone else Jung, I think, is responsible for the widespread popular acceptance of occult, mystical, and paranormal ideas that has been with us since the 1960s. Jung even agreed with the hippies about the coming age of Aquarius; the Beatles were fans of his, just as they were of Aleister Crowley.

Freud was never so forthright about his own occult interests, which he certainly had, all public dismissal of it notwithstanding. Even more than Jung, Freud kept the few occult interests he had very much to himself and shared them only with a small band of followers. He allowed himself only a few, very muted and unsatisfying expressions of his fascination with the "black tide of mud" that he wanted his crown prince to help him keep at bay.

Freud's writing on occultism makes up a few papers and some remarks scattered here and there in other works. The best known of these writings is "Psychoanalysis and Telepathy". This paper was not published in Freud's lifetime – although the material did appear in some other places – and was first read at an informal gathering of Freud's closest followers in the Harz Mountains in August 1921. Freud's other papers on the occult include "Dreams and Telepathy" (1922), "The Occult Significance of Dreams" (1925), and "Dreams and Occultism" (1937).

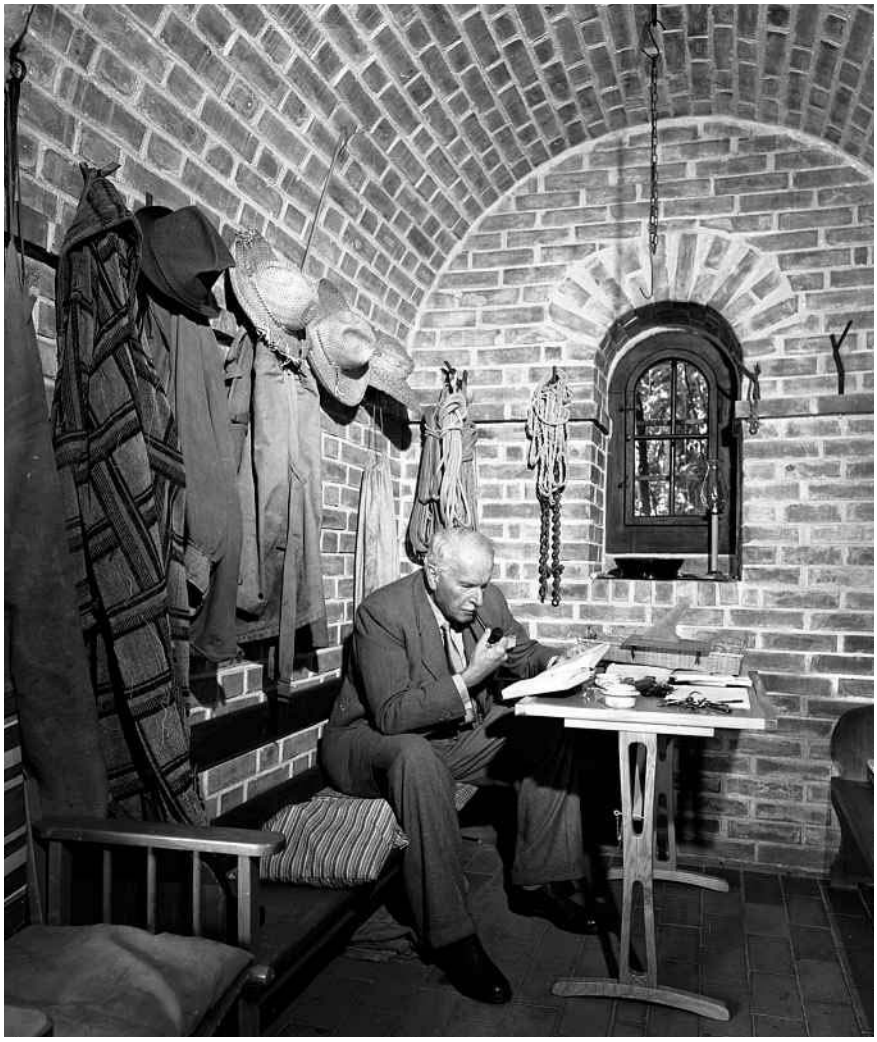
"Psychoanalysis and Telepathy" was originally supposed to report on three cases, but Freud told his select audience that in classic Freudian style his resistance to talking about the occult made him leave behind the material for one case – the most interesting one, in fact, which we will get to further on – so he was forced to work with other material. The paper begins with a note of paranoia. "We are not destined, so it seems," Freud told the faithful few, "to devote ourselves quietly to the extension of our science."

Here Freud is referring to recent attacks on him by the apostates Jung and Adler. But they are not the only threat. It has come to Freud's attention of late that an association between psychoanalysis and occultism is being made in some quarters. He would rather not speak about this but it is no longer possible to avoid it.

There are, he admits, some superficial similarities between psychoanalysis and occultism. Yet while he recognises that a study of occultism may be unavoidable – if only to clarify its differences from psychoanalysis – it can also have a damaging effect. Psychoanalysis should avoid being tarred with occultism's brush, and in order to do this Freud tells the faithful that he has even had to decline several offers to write for various magazines and journals specialising in the occult.

Freud then refers to Einstein's theory of relativity and the discovery of radium, remarking darkly that these in some way undermine "the objective trustworthiness of science". What Freud means is that these new developments were undermining the kind of science that he was comfortable with, namely the 19th century mechanistic variety which Einstein, radium, and quantum physics had by this time already made obsolete. Freud seems to be hinting that, in some way, occultism is in league with Einstein and Madame Curie in a plot to overthrow the kind of cause-and-effect universe in which he felt at home.

Freud recognised that psychoanalysis and occultism both broke with conventional thinking, causing them to be singled out for a certain amount of opprobrium from the establishment – to the popular mind, probably deservedly – and that both aimed to widen and broaden their appeal in the face of fierce resistance. They could in this sense be seen as fellow travellers. Yet while this is true, there is an absolute, fundamental difference between the two. Occultists, Freud says, place much trust in faith – although which occultists he had in mind and how they would respond to this remark we don't know. However, psychoanalysis, Freud continues, is motivated by "an extreme distrust of the



DMITRI KESSELL / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Jung reading in his home at Küsnacht, Switzerland, where visitors reported that the furniture and woodwork would creak – was the psychologist's "exteriorised libido" at work again?

power of human wishes and the temptation of the pleasure principle." Here we can say that Freud is advocating a "hermeneutic of suspicion" well in advance of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's coining of that phrase. And indeed Freud is one of the modern thinkers, along with Marx and Nietzsche, on whom Ricoeur based the idea.

Unlike faith-besotted occultists, analysts, Freud tells his own faithful, are fundamentally "incorrigible mechanists and materialists". They study the occult so as to "finally exclude the wishes of mankind from material reality". If they attended to occult phenomena, rather than ignoring or denying them, it "would mean surrendering the impartiality, lack of prejudice and prepossessions" that make up their "analytical armour".

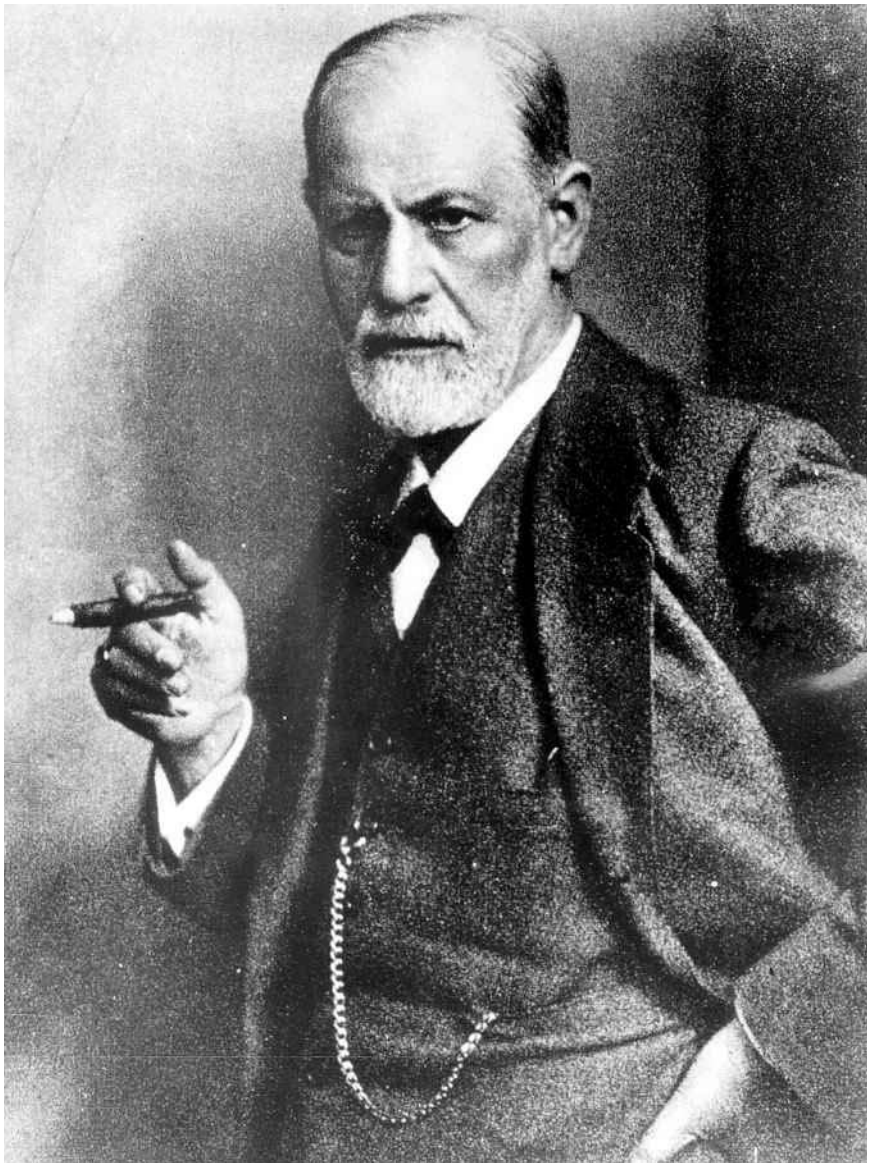
Even worse, if they attend to occult phenomena, analysts would soon see that they actually did happen. Psychoanalysis would then be involved in a practice that proved the reality of the occult. We must take note here. Freud is saying to his closest confederates that occult phenomena are *real*. They do occur. But knowing this, psychoanalysis must not in any way assist in this truth being revealed. It must even ignore what it knows to be true and do its best to *maintain the opposite*. It must do this because if occult phenomena were revealed to be true, this would have a damaging effect on the populace. It would, in effect, make them weak-minded – something, we should note, that some critics of psychoanalysis accused it of doing itself.

For Freud, admitting the reality of occult phenomena would "extend belief in whatever explanation and to those easiest and most to their [the public's] taste." If we accept that telepathy or clairvoyance is true, what's next? Angels and Devils? Relativity and radium are already breaking windows in Newton's universe. Do we really want to break more? No, we must remain steadfast, and form a bulwark of 19th century rationalism. Occultism is bad because it panders to our readiness to believe. It is "joyfully acclaimed by all the credulity lying ready to hand since the infancy of the human race and the childhood of the individual". As far as Freud is concerned, credulity is something to avoid. But if occultism is true, as Freud suggests, how can it be credulous to believe in it?

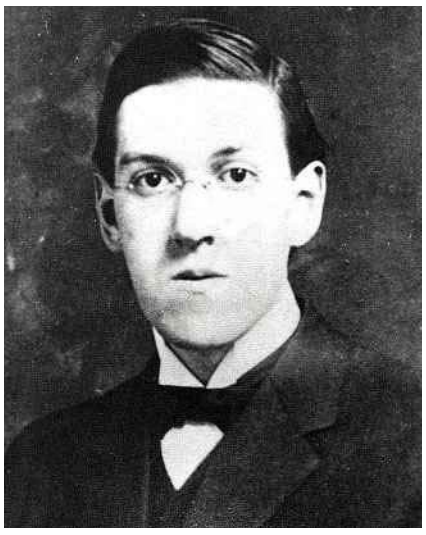
But never mind such quibbles. They pale in comparison to the threat waiting in the wings – namely the "fearful collapse of critical thought, of determinist standards and of mechanistic science" that would result if the truth about the occult were to be told. For Freud, accepting the reality of the occult would mean the end of the world as he knew it, and he was not giving up without a fight.

DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

In many ways Freud's fear in the face of the occult is similar to the reaction to it of other severe rationalists, such as the neo-Marxist philosopher Theodore Adorno and, oddly enough, the horror writer HP Lovecraft. Freud would agree with Adorno's characterisation of occultism as the "metaphysics of dunces" and that its embrace signalled a "flight from reason" in the historian of the occult James Webb's famous phrase. For Adorno it marked a regression in critical thinking and kept the populace happy with astral bread and circuses.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Freud was determined that his work should be a bulwark "against the black tide of mud of occultism". **LEFT:** HP Lovecraft, despite his horror fiction, maintained a similarly materialistic position. **FACING PAGE:** British author John Galsworthy, whose *Forsyte Saga* Freud had been introduced to by his patient 'Herr P'.

Although he was the author of several classic horror tales, many of which employ various occult devices, Lovecraft maintained a ferociously materialist view of the world, denying in fact the metaphysical terrors that he created in fiction. Like Freud he believed that too much knowledge about the occult could be a bad thing – as the protagonists of many of his tales discover to their woe. As his letters show, Lovecraft preferred Adler to Freud, but he agreed with him that too much knowledge is dangerous… and that knowledge of the occult is the most dangerous of all. They both would agree with TS Eliot's dour dictum that "humankind cannot bear too much reality".

Yet while Freud warned against a public affirmation of the occult, in private he hit a different note, saying his interest, though genuine, was "personal", like his cigars and his Jewishness, and had nothing to do with psychoanalysis. It was a kind of hobby. This doublethink clearly indicates a

profound ambivalence, one he feared and sought to resolve through sheer force of dogma. We can see this ambivalence in his writings. As his daughter Anna remarked: "The subject fascinated, as well as repelled him." His biographer Ernst Jones said that Freud enjoyed telling stories of strange coincidences and mysterious voices, and that these things maintained a hold on him. Freud once even "propitiated the gods" by sacrificing one of his cherished antiques, when his daughter Mathilde was ill. If Freud's own "credulity" was enough for him to make an offering to supernatural powers in order to secure his daughter's health, we must agree that between his public and private relation to the occult there was a profound dissonance, far more than in the case of Jung.

This ambivalence can be found in Freud's other occult writings. In "Dreams and Telepathy", Freud tells us that we will not learn anything about telepathy in the paper, not even whether he believes in it or not. He had, in fact, no opinion on it, one way or another, which might suggest to an unsympathetic reader that he should not have bothered to write it. Yet in 1925, a few years after announcing his diffidence toward telepathy in this paper, Freud and Anna conducted "informal" telepathic experiments. According to Peter Gay, another biographer of Freud, their exact nature is unknown but they had something to do with hunting for mushrooms. Yet, even after this, Freud advised Sandor Ferenczi *not* to read a paper on these experiments to an upcoming psychoanalytical congress.

Freud, it seems, could not let the occult go, but neither could he embrace it seriously, in the way that Jung did. He did a neurotic two-step with it, indulging his interest, but then declaring that it was fundamentally unimportant and not necessary for psychoanalysis. Unlike Freud, Jung brought the occult into his work; or rather, his work grew out of it. Where Freud wanted to plug a hole in the psyche's dam, so that the black, muddy tide of the occult would not leak through, Jung not only pulled his finger out, he positively knocked down the dyke. The Oedipal agon doesn't get more serious than this.

"Dreams and Telepathy" was read to another gathering of a select few. In it Freud relates two cases of fortune telling – precognition – which did not come true. He tells us his attitude toward the cases is "unenthusiastic and ambivalent", and that he is "disagreeably affected" by them. He relates the cases "under the pressure of the greatest resistance". And he concludes that, "nothing can be done against such clear resistance". What was Freud resisting?

MR FORESIGHT

I think he was resisting synchronicity. This becomes clear, I think, if we look at the case Freud left out of his paper on "Psychoanalysis and Telepathy", given to his inner circle in the Harz Mountains, having conveniently left his notes about it behind. In psychoanalysis, resistance is a sign that the patient is unwilling to talk about something.

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Why was Freud unwilling to talk about this case?

It concerned a patient Freud was seeing during a fallow period following the First World War. Freud had agreed to see Herr P, but only on a limited basis, and it was clear to Herr P that Freud was not that interested in him and that once Freud's practice picked up again, he would terminate the analysis. Herr P, we can assume, was not happy with this arrangement, but Freud would not budge and his patient was forced to accept what he could get. One day, just before Herr P's session, Freud received a message that his British disciple David Forsyth had arrived in Vienna and was eager to catch up. Freud would have seen him immediately, had it not been for Herr P, but he couldn't cancel his appointment, and so he told Forsyth that he would see him when his patient had left.

At their next session, Herr P suddenly, and quite out of the blue, started to tell Freud about a woman he knew who used to call him "Herr Vorsicht". *Vorsicht* in German means caution or, as it is in English, "foresight." Freud was struck by the coincidence of his patient telling him that he was once called Herr Vorsicht, or "Mr Foresight", when Freud was happy to have renewed his contact with his own Mr Forsyth. The similarity in sound of "foresight" and Forsyth seemed remarkable, as was the fact that Herr P had never mentioned his strange nickname before, and had done so only after Freud's own Mr Forsyth had turned up. Herr P, of course, did not know of Freud's British student and the coincidence of Freud's student arriving and his patient claiming to, in effect, have the same name as him, was, to say the least remarkable. We might say that Herr Vorsicht displayed a strange foresight about Mr Forsyth.

Freud believed that Herr P had somehow intuited that Freud was happy about Forsyth's arrival – which marked the end of the fallow time following the war and the return of his foreign students – and also that he was impatient with having to continue treating him. Herr P already knew that he was, in Freud's eyes, really only "second best," and in order to secure Freud's attention, he transformed himself into his own Mr Forsyth – in effect saying to Freud: "Don't neglect me. I am a Forsyth too". Strangely, Herr P had earlier introduced Freud to the work of the novelist John Galsworthy, specifically the novels of his *Forsyte Saga*.

To Jung, this would have represented a classic example of synchronicity; that is, the "acausal connecting principle" at work in "meaningful coincidence", accounts of which can be found in many places in Jung's work (see **FT171:42-47**). Freud too believed that something more than coincidence was at work in this case, but he preferred to rationalise this as an effect of the transference going on between him and the unfortunate Herr P. Freud indulges in some word juggling, but in the end he accepted that some kind of "thought transference" between himself and Herr P must have taken place. But Freud was so troubled by this that he terminated the analysis shortly after Herr P's "Forsyth" episode – no doubt something that Herr Vorsicht himself must have foreseen.

That Freud mislaid the notes for this story suggests, as Freud said himself, a profound resistance to it. Its subsequent history only adds to this impression. The original notes were missing for some time. In 1933, a definitive text was finally put together, but it would not be published until 1941, two years after Freud's death. The original copy of this version also went missing until 2010. That Freud mislaid material for what seems a remarkable case, and then for the text of the talk also to go missing for decades, suggests that something very powerful was at work here, *repressing* what for Freud must have been a very uncomfortable thought. I suggest that the poltergeist in Freud's bookcase, revealed or introduced by his one-time heir apparent Carl Jung, so shook the revered master that for the rest of his life, he was always a little frightened of the occult. FT

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FORESEEING A DISASTER?

FORGOTTEN DREAMS OF ABERFAN

PHOTO: JIM GRAY / GETTY IMAGES

Shortly after 9.15am on the morning of Friday, 21 October 1966, the worst disaster in post-WWII Welsh history struck the village of Aberfan, Glamorgan. An avalanche of coal waste from the Merthyr Vale Colliery poured down the mountainside, engulfing Pantglas Junior School and killing 144 people, 128 of them children in their classrooms. The fact that victims were so overwhelmingly children imbued the calamity with a sense of horror which marked it as exceptional, even in the long history of Welsh mining disasters. Indeed, so traumatic was the impact of Aberfan that, far from persisting in public consciousness, the tragedy seemed almost expunged from collective memory, until the 50th anniversary approached in October 2016 and commemorations were held across Wales.

AN AVALANCHE OF COAL WASTE POURED DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

Yet in the immediate aftermath of the disaster in the autumn of 1966, the nationwide sense of shock and grief was acute. In its wake, the anguished questions so frequently ventilated after man-made calamities were voiced. Officially and privately, numerous people asked if the disaster could in any way have been foreseen or averted. For some, the search for answers to such questions went far beyond the bounds of the technical and legal inquiries commenced by Parliament and in the media. In the weeks following the tragedy public appeals were launched with the aim of discovering if Aberfan had been foreseen by anyone on a psychic level, in premonitions or precognitive dreams.

DR BARKER'S DREAM SURVEY

The man largely responsible for launching investigations into premonitions of the disaster was Dr JC Barker, a consultant psychiatrist at the Shelton Hospital in Shrewsbury who, on the day after the tragedy, had travelled to Aberfan to offer help. Shocked by the devastation and by the trauma suffered by survivors, the bereaved and rescue teams, Barker found himself wondering if anyone could have

experienced a premonition of the events.

Driven by this notion, he approached Peter Fairley, Science Correspondent for the London *Evening Standard*, who became an immediate ally in what developed into a nationwide investigation. One week later, Fairley published an appeal in the newspaper on 28 October 1966, requesting any persons who had experienced a premonition or dreamed of the tragedy before it occurred to get in touch. Widely syndicated in the national and psychic press, over the following two months Barker and Fairley received letters from 76 people all claiming to have experienced dreams or premonitions of the Aberfan disaster before it occurred.[1] Some of the reported premonitions were so vague and indefinite that Barker judged there was nothing linking them with Aberfan, but 60 were deemed worthy of further investigation. Barker stated: "I was impressed by the sincerity and co-operation of the vast majority of correspondents. Many seemed delighted to be able to relate their experiences to an interested party, having previously been ridiculed if they had mentioned them to relatives or friends."[2]

Some 36 correspondents reported dreaming of the disaster in the weeks before, with the remainder recounting visions or psychic forewarnings in other ways, including an intense feeling of anxiety or unease not long before it occurred. In a few instances, impressions of the impending tragedy were received clairvoyantly at spiritualist 'home-circle' gatherings.

To obtain some degree of corroboration that the premonitions occurred before 21 October 1966, Barker wrote to all 60 correspondents requesting the names and addresses of witnesses who might confirm the writer's experiences had been related prior to the disaster. Confirmation arrived in 24 cases. Several of the reported predictions struck Barker as particularly significant. A Mrs Grace Eagleton stated:

"*I have never been to Wales nor do I possess a television set. One week before the disaster I had a vivid horrible dream of a terrible disaster in a coal-mining village. It was a valley with a big building filled with young children. Mountains of coal and water were rushing down the valley burying the building. The screams of the children were so vivid that I screamed myself. Everything all happened so quickly. Then it all went black.*"

Her account was confirmed by a neighbour with whom she had shared details of her dream, a Mrs Rollings. Mrs Eagleton stated: "I have had many dreams and premonitions which have come true."[3]

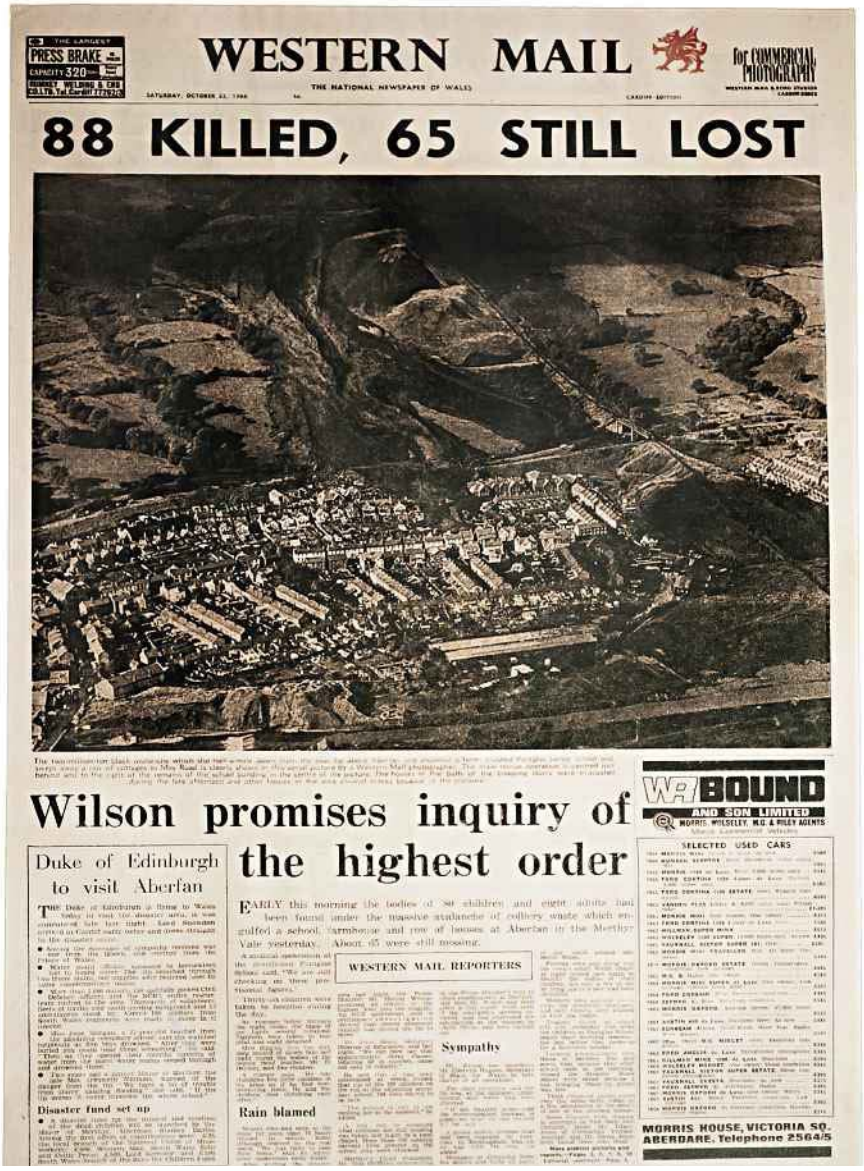
One of the saddest and most poignant dreams had been noted by the family of Eryl Mai Jones, aged 10, a pupil of Pantglas school who was killed in the disaster. Two weeks before, she had suddenly told her mother: "Mummy, I'm not afraid to die." Her mother replied: "Why do you talk of dying, and you so young; do you want a lollipop?" "No," Eryl said, "but I shall be with Peter and June" (two schoolmates). The day before the disaster she said to her mother: "Mummy, let me tell you about my dream last night." Her mother answered gently: "Darling, I've no time now. Tell me again later." The child replied: "No, Mummy, you *must* listen. I dreamt I went to school and there was no school there. Something black had come down all over it." The next day her daughter went off to school as happy as ever. That morning her mother was also due to go into Pantglas Junior school soon after her daughter, but curiously, just as Eryl Mai Jones left her home for the last time, the clock stopped at 9.00am. As a result, her mother mistook the time, delaying her and saving her life.[4]

As well as dreams, spiritualists from Aylesbury and Plymouth came forward with stories of messages involving working in mines, Wales and "an avalanche of coal" coming down a mountain.

Barker later published extracts from the accounts and an analysis in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. He may have planned further analysis but any such intention was curtailed by his own sudden death, two years later, at the early age of 44. Posthumously, his study has become a classic, being frequently cited in the literature of precognitive dreams.[5]

MORE BAD DREAMS

However, it has been all but forgotten that a second public appeal for premonitions of the Aberfan disaster was also made in the autumn of 1966. Launched three days after



WESTERN MAIL

THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF WALES

88 KILLED, 65 STILL LOST

Wilson promises inquiry of the highest order

Duke of Edinburgh to visit Aberfan

WESTERN MAIL REPORTERS

Sympathy

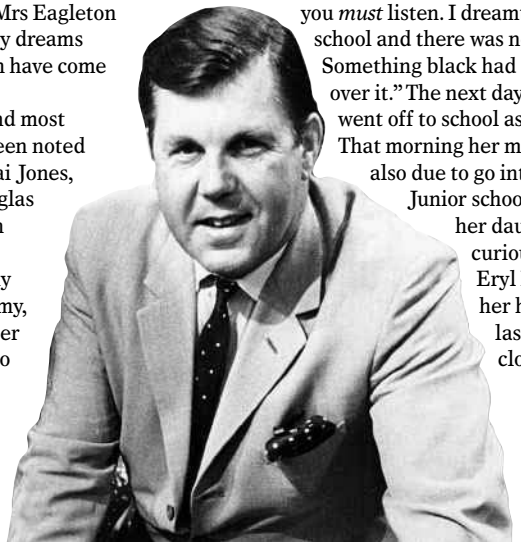
Rain blamed

Disaster fund set up

SELECTED USED CARS

MORRIS HOUSE, VICTORIA SQ. ABERDARE. Telephone 2564/5

CHRIS HOWES / WILD PLACES PHOTOGRAPHY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



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ABOVE: The *Western Mail* reports on the Aberfan disaster on the morning of 22 October 1966. The death toll would rise to 144 in the following days. **BELOW:** Peter Fairley, Science Correspondent for the London *Evening Standard*, became involved with Dr JC Barker's appeal for dreams and premonitions.

the Barker-Fairley appeal, it was initiated by the Oxford Institute for Psychophysical Research, a private research organisation interested in anomalous experiences. Its Aberfan appeal was promoted by articles published in the *Sun* and *Thompson's Weekly*[6] and although never attracting the same level of subsequent attention as the Barker initiative, it swiftly received 74 letters from some 72 different correspondents around England and Wales. Like the Barker-Fairley appeal, the respondents all reported disturbing dreams, forebodings or visions that they felt had anticipated the Aberfan disaster. Unfortunately, this second collection of premonitions was never published anywhere in full, nor subjected to any detailed examination or comparative study with Barker's material.

Fortunately, photocopies of the letters received by the Institute have survived, having been deposited with the Society for Psychical Research in 1972. Today they are preserved at Cambridge University Library, in a file that had gone unexamined for 44 years until I came to view it in the autumn of 2016.[7] Details from some of the letters are now published here for the first time.

A spiritualist from Stockton claimed to have had forewarning of Aberfan as early as 10 months before, at a séance held on 28 December 1965. Messages were received by the circle that included "All Wales will mourn", "the moving mountain", "Look after the children", "Nothing would stop the disaster" and a mention of "moving buckets". It was recalled that rescuers cleared the debris, removing bucket after bucket of material from the buried school.

Another account came from Mr Thomas Barnett at Chapplefields, Leeds, stating that some three weeks before the disaster a message had been received from a medium: "Something coming from the ground… earth… dear little bodies… I can hear water… very, very cold… never happened before… you will all be shocked… never never happen… these men dabbling with nature… they can't understand what harm they are doing… will shock the whole nation."

One lady from Basingstoke reported dreaming of being in a village where there would be "a mine explosion" but she "could not explain the women digging in the black mess and screaming… As I walked towards the village I realised the mud was getting worse until I could go no further" and that "in front of me was mud everywhere".

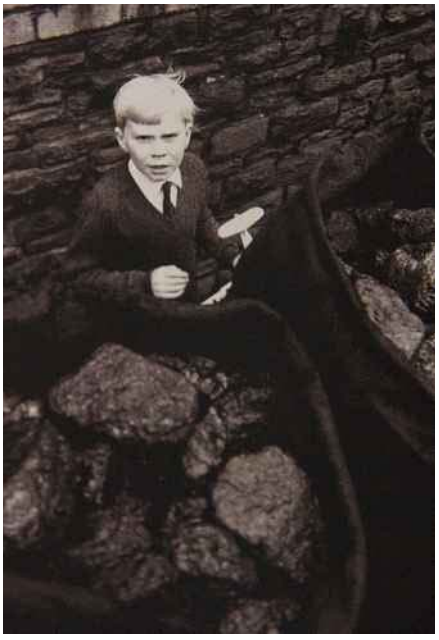
A lady from Hipperholme, Halifax, had a disturbing dream two days before Aberfan, which made her think that "something terrible was going to happen to a mine or similar. Normally, I never remember if I dream but all day on the Wednesday I felt quite ill as a result of what I had seen… [I] wondered if amongst those children was a distant relative of mine. My grandmother was from Wales."

Other correspondents had dreams of mass funerals. "I dreamt I was at a mass funeral on a hillside where hundreds of people were singing 'Guide me O my Great Jehovah' in a way that only Welsh people can sing," reported a lady from Cwmbran, who had awoken feeling "very exhausted and depressed" afterwards. She thought it relevant she was the daughter of a miner (though descendants of mining families in Wales are common). Another respondent from Leeds described how on the Tuesday night before the disaster, "I had a very upsetting and confusing dream. A woman dressed in black told me I must attend a mass funeral."

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Miners and rescue workers take in the scale of the disaster. **BELOW:** Eight-year-old Geoff Edwards was the last of the children from Pantglas Junior School to be pulled alive from the rubble.

"WOMEN WERE DIGGING IN THE BLACK MESS AND SCREAMING"



WPA POOL / GETTY IMAGES

She then saw "a crowded square and a sunken garden full of neat rows of coffins".

Some correspondents described physical sensations. A lady from Westerham felt she as if been trapped "in wet soggy clay", an "awful feeling".

A dream left another writer with "a most peculiar feeling. One I do not like… I saw the greyness of the dust and the awful quietness and a boy in good school clothes carried out and no breath in his body and then I felt it magnified many, many times… It was all so silent."

One of the most detailed dreams was reported as having happened on the Wednesday before the disaster, by a lady in Ely, Cardiff who dreamed of being a schoolteacher. The dream began with "a sense of shock like something very heavy falling" and children crying "like frightened sheep" and "a man, 28, face white with fear" (notably, 28 adults died at Aberfan although she did not refer to this). In her dream the air darkened, and all the windows, save one, blacked out. "With one window visible the desire to get to the light was terrible, I reached frantically for the window but in a flash it darkened, something struck me, I was flying back into now pitch darkness." She wondered if via her dream "I experienced somebody's dreadful fear".

In other dreams the connection was vaguer, as with one experienced the week before by a lady who reported having previous premonitions. She described it as "dark, black and very noisy" and involving being on a road sticky with black tar, someone crying for help and a high wall "which I interpreted as the mountain". A 64-year-old factory nurse from Garstang, Preston, Lancashire, had a dream the night before Aberfan, "which seemed to stick in my memory" of a "huge heap of bricks and rubble in my backyard… [I] thought a

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LEFT: Rescue and relief efforts in Aberfan in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

chimney had fallen." She was so impressed that she actually went and checked a tall chimney overlooking her own back yard.

A Port Talbot correspondent reported how she had dreamed of being at home and seeing blood. In her dream, on going to the window, drawing back the curtain and looking out, she had seen a "field of small coal".

Some correspondents mentioned religious elements and symbols. A lady at Tupsley, Herefordshire, reported that three weeks before the disaster she had undergone a vision during a church service of a mountain moving in front of the children's altar and Mothers' Union banner. "I thought of black lava… I felt far away and cold. All day I suffered this vision."

A male writer from Blackpool who described himself as "a man of mature years" recounted a dream as follows: "The action in the dream was centred about a rain-soaked town or village. The sky was a leaden dark colour. Then to the foreground came a neighbour of mine, name of Thomas, a schoolmaster. We were walking together when my attention was focused on what seemed to be a background of a panoramic picture of numerous spaceships travelling at fantastic speed. On drawing my neighbour's attention to this they seemed to change into very large biblical figures. The scene then changed to when I seemed to be trying to take a bucket out of my neighbour's hand, and then lifting the roof of what seemed to be a model building and looking in various rooms. That is as much as I can remember. A few hours later I learned of the Aberfan disaster."

"I THOUGHT OF BLACK LAVA… I FELT FAR AWAY AND COLD"

These elements of religion and spaceships also figured in one of the weirdest visions, claimed some six years later as an omen of the Aberfan disaster (see 'The Tenby UFO Connection' on the opposite page).

SLEEP AND STATISTICS

Of course, both the Barker-Fairley and Oxford Institute collections, in common with many anecdotal cases of precognition, suffered the disadvantage of being recorded after the disaster. This reduced their evidential weight, and rendered testimony vulnerable to hoaxing or post-event rationalisations or distortions. Critics also raised a lack of controls and Barker himself recognised "most of them might be regarded as rather vague prognostications of doom," and that given the size of the UK population and people dreaming several dreams a night, "it would indeed be surprising if they did not produce a few dozen premonitions of doom amongst them." Nevertheless, he proposed that the Aberfan disaster was an extremely unusual one, so that dreams resembling it were likely to be fairly improbable.

The same critique has been advanced again more recently by Professor Richard Wiseman (see his 'Dreaming the Future', **FT273:36-39**) who argues against the possibility of precognitive dreaming on the basis that "the science of sleep and the study of statistics suggest that precognitive dreams may well be due to anxiety and the law of large numbers (basically that unusual events are likely to happen when there are lots of opportunities for that event)". [8]

In advancing this, he postulates a dreamer (whom he calls 'Brian') and applies a series of assumptions: (1) that Brian dreams each night of his life between the of age 15 to 75; (2) that over 60 years this amounts to 21,900 nights of dreams; (3) that an event like the Aberfan disaster will only happen once on a randomly assigned date in each generation; (3) that Brian only remembers dreaming about the type of terrible events associated with such tragedy once in his entire life. From this the "chances of Brian having his 'disaster' dream the night before the actual tragedy is about a massive 22,000 to 1."

Wiseman again highlights the fact that with a British population in excess of 45 million in the 1960s, "this same set of events could have happened to any of them." Then by presuming that each of the 45 million people dream in the same way as the postulated dreaming Brian, Wiseman makes the further assumption that the chances of "anyone having the 'disaster dream' one night and the tragedy happening the following day is about 22,000 to 1"; so "we would expect one person in every 22,000, or roughly 2,000 people, to have this amazing experience in each generation."

Superficially this seems an impressive statistical demolition of dream precognition. But a moment's thought indicates an hypothesis resting upon wholly speculative, untestable and unfalsifiable assumptions.

Leaving aside the fact that 'dreaming Brian' is purely hypothetical, we have no other data on what individuals actually dream through the course of a lifetime, or any way of ever knowing what the entire UK population dreamed about on the nights before 21 October 1966, nor at any other time. It is difficult enough to count a population, let alone discover anything about millions of subjective night-time experiences.

Furthermore, given that the range of subjects to dream about is potentially infinite, one might equally say it is highly improbable that anyone would ever dream of any particular subject or specific event in the course of a lifetime. Indeed, statistical objections collapse if the infinite number of subjects to dream about is introduced as a factor in the calculations. But this also takes

us into the realm of the statistically absurd, as celebrated in Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* whereby the population of the Universe can effectively be counted as zero! There is, of course, a finite number of beings on Earth (and possibly a number on other worlds yet to be discovered). But any finite population exists within what appears to be infinite space. Statistically, any finite number divided by infinity is not exactly zero, but would be so tiny as to be virtually indistinguishable from zero…

Ultimately, it is far better to admit the limitations of statistical techniques in this area. With one-off or rare events there is really a limit to what statistics can ever usefully tell us. [9] Indeed, one need not involve the whole of the UK population in any statistical refutation of precognitive dreaming. If an individual experiences only one potentially precognitive dream in a lifetime – amid some 22,000 non-precognitive dreams (adopting the Wiseman formula) – the one deviation is a statistically insignificant and essentially meaningless event. Furthermore, the problem is compounded by the fact that no time limit or deadline is necessarily placed on fulfilment. Floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, wars and all manner of human disasters such as aircraft crashes and building collapses all occur with tragic frequency. One may anticipate them somewhere without any recourse to paranormal powers.

Rather it is far better to admit that quantitative techniques are wholly unsuited when examining what are essentially qualitative and subjective personal experiences like dreams. A rather more demanding approach is to examine an actual dream report and try to identify veridical elements within it – facts or features which apparently correspond to the reality of a later specific event.

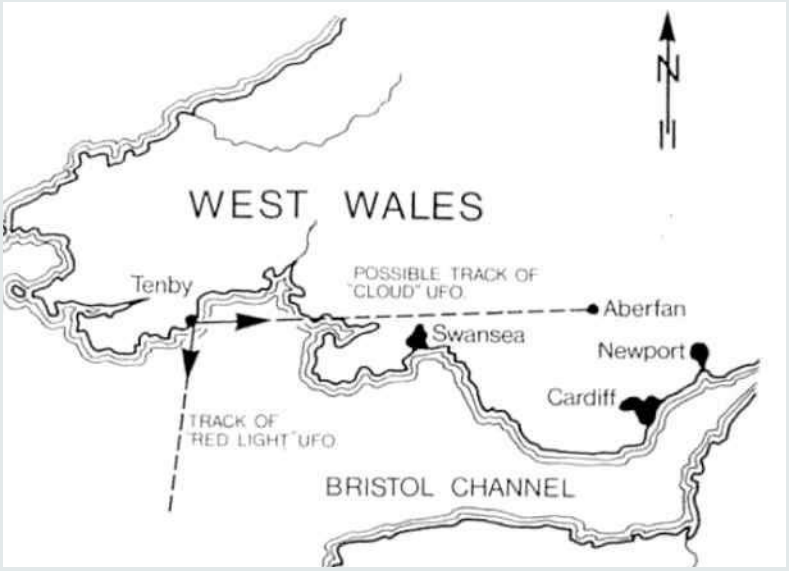
This type of assessment was proposed the year before Aberfan by psychical researcher Guy Lambert (1889-1983), who listed a set of provisos he termed the 'desiderata' to be sought if a precognitive dream was to be treated as evidential:

1. The dream should be reported to a credible witness.
2. The time interval between the dream and the event should be short.
3. The event should be one that, in the circumstances of the dreamer, seemed extremely improbable at the time of the dream.
4. The description in the dream should be of an event destined to be literally fulfilled and not merely symbolically foreshadowed.
5. The details of the dream should tally with the details of the event. [10]

Applying these 'desiderata', weaknesses can at once be found in many, if not all, of the precognitive dreams collected by the Aberfan premonition appeals. If narrowly and literally applied, provisos four and five effectively exclude most, if not all, of the dreams, if symbolic (or what appears to be symbolic material) is rejected.

For example, in the Oxford Institute collection, a lady from Burton upon Trent reported dreaming a week earlier "of an earthquake and could plainly see ruins of buildings and climbing over the rubble and helping to carry people over the debris was

THE TENBY UFO CONNECTION



One of the most extraordinary Aberfan visions, involving a UFO and postulating a divine source of other premonitions and dreams, was claimed by journalist and Loch Ness monster hunter FW Holiday in an article entitled "Was God at Aberfan?" published in *Flying Saucer Review* in 1972. [1]

Holiday described his experience on 8 October 1966 when, around 7pm, he was fishing for whiting on the lifeboat slipway at Tenby harbour in South Wales. Noticing "an undercurrent of excitement" amongst other fishermen, he saw above their heads what appeared to be "a small, bluish, luminous cloud… a self-luminous lump of cotton wool" moving in a circle about three times its own diameter. The object was opaque and blotted out the stars and appeared "about the size of a 10p coin held at arm's length". Holiday also heard someone talking about 'lights' and 'coloured lights' but after a while he resumed his fishing. However, about 10 minutes later there were exclamations and cries when a dark object emerged from the cloud "beaming a brilliant ruby light down on us". The 'cloud' then moved west and the red light object moved south-west. Holiday raced for the binoculars in his car, but by the time he retrieved them both objects had moved out of vision range. He declared: "Until this incident occurred my interest in alleged UFO phenomena was marginal".

Later, following the direction of the cloud object and plotting its presumed course with a map, Holiday noticed that after 57 miles (92km) it would have "arrived over or very near the village of Aberfan about the time the precognitive dreams were starting to occur." Although he admitted that, "lacking evidence we can only say that the object *may* have pursued a straight course," possessed by this notion, Holiday speculated "that it reached Aberfan some 13 days before the disaster." He wondered if his sighting represented a manifestation of entities aware of the impending landslip and seeking to warn the population in dreams and premonitions "obtained by a telepathic link with a mind or minds which themselves are doing the overlooking". The year after publishing this account Holiday wrote the book *The Dragon and the Disc* (1973) suggesting that both lake monsters and UFOs were connected to a greater psychic dimension of the mind, a theme he expanded in his posthumously published *The Goblin Universe* (1986), a work linking ghosts, poltergeists, the reincarnation of serial killers, the Loch Ness Monster, cryptozoology and UFOs in an eccentric and confusing mix.

In Hallowe'en 2002 I made enquiries in Tenby to see if there was any recollection of the incident described by Holiday. Unsurprisingly, I learned nothing beyond the opinion of some locals that the British Government had tested rockets and aircraft in the area during the 1960s. However, local reports of UFOs are still occasionally being published on the Internet in the 21st century but without any apparent links to contemporary disasters. [2]

1 *Flying Saucer Review* vol.18, no.4, July-Aug 1972.

2 See for example: www.ufomaps.co.uk/sightings/tenby/ LIAMBERRIDGE.php?id=829; www.uk-ufo.co.uk/tenby-south-west-wales-29th-

JIM GRAY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Rescue workers search for survivors among the waste and rubble. **BELOW:** Author JB Priestley, who in 1963 speculated about premonitions in his book *Man and Time*.

a young man I thought was my boss". Explaining the Welsh connection to the imagery she stated: "I work for a publican whose son is at Cardiff University and is married to a Welsh girl who is a teacher".

Similarly, one of Barker's correspondents, a Mrs Hoffman of Ealing, dreamed two weeks before of standing with a woman and children at the foot of a dark a mountain. Suddenly hundreds of beautiful black horses came thundering down and engulfed them. In the herd was an old-fashioned funeral hearse. This "terrible dream" was followed by people running to the same place with "terrible expressions".

Nonetheless, certain patterns in the two premonition collections concerning Aberfan are noticeable. Firstly, the respondents were overwhelmingly female in both collections. Secondly, a number of the writers claimed to have experienced fulfilled premonitions in the past. Thirdly, and above all, the emotional content and report impact is very strong in many of the dream accounts. Judging by the letters preserved, the personal impact of dreaming of a disaster that goes on to occur can be significant. From the statements provided and the language used, these dreams frequently made a disturbing impression, over and above what might ordinarily be expected from a nightmare. A number of correspondents reported powerful and lasting feelings of anxiety and distress that they could not account for in any other way. This is an aspect that those simply dismissing such experiences as random occurrences ought to consider.

FOX PHOTOS / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

PRIESTLEY'S PATTERNS

Interestingly, just such a pattern had been noted with an earlier dream collection by playwright and author JB Priestley in his book *Man and Time* (1963). [11] Priestley considered that in this kind of case, the apparent message from the future might not simply be limited to a dream or any consciously recognisable information, but also be experienced as a physical reaction within the body of the person.

Priestley called this effect FIP ('Future Influencing the Past') proposing the body could respond to future events before the mind did, and even if the conscious mind of the person did not understand what was taking place until afterwards. Barker noticed a similar pattern, taking the view that premonitions might generate anxiety symptoms affecting the waking self, [12] a possibility that parapsychologists have more lately begun to explore in laboratory experiments involving pre-sentience effects. [13]

The existence of such patterns suggests the operation of more than the purely random factors envisaged in the hypothetical 'dreaming Brian' scenario. Similarities that Barker found in accounts following Aberfan led him to propose that "some future major disasters, particularly those with unusual features, should perhaps be examined carefully in the light of possible associated premonitions. It would be interesting to ascertain whether the same type of pattern emerges from the possible precognitive material and to determine whether the temporary symptoms of anxiety manifested by certain individuals are a reliable index of impending calamities." [14] His opinions actually resulted in the foundation of a short-lived 'Premonitions Bureau', which endeavoured to collect dreams from the public, though hopes that it would become an established disaster early-warning system were never fulfilled. [15] Interest in premonitions waned following the death of Barker, whilst the accounts gathered by the Oxford Institute went unstudied, and were simply filed away and forgotten.

In the decades since, the theory that predictive dreams do not relate to any future event but represent a perception of the dreamer's own state of mind in the future is also one that has received attention. Rather

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The Sun rises over the valley as people arrive for a memorial service at Aberfan cemetery on 21 October 2016 to mark 50 years since the tragedy.

than foreseeing the event itself, it is proposed the dreamer is actually apprehending their own future mental reactions. Thus, on awakening, the dreamer is effectively remembering experiences that have yet to be laid down in their own memory, but will be after learning of the future event after it occurs.

This idea is one now receiving serious consideration from researchers, both in Britain and Spain.[16] If this scenario is correct, it would explain examples in which correspondents connected dream images with the shock they felt on seeing Aberfan images on television or in the press. One woman in Yeovil wrote: "I dreamed of Aberfan before it happened… About a fortnight before the disaster I visited Aberfan in my dreams. I had not been to Wales, but I know from television pictures that it was Aberfan". In other cases, correspondents stated they had recognised groups of rescue workers or individual people from their dreams appearing in later media coverage. In Barker's collection, a spiritualist, Mrs Milder of Plymouth, said she had a vision of a boy amid a rescue operation; later she believed she saw the same scene and child in TV coverage of the disaster broadcast the following Sunday.

Much research remains to be done on the premonition accounts collected by the Oxford Institute half a century ago. With such a gap in time, the chances of now obtaining any corroboration of any of them are slight. But although some might provide – at most – suggestive evidence for possible precognitive dreams, analysis of such reports may increase our understanding of how dream states influence waking perceptions, and how premonitions are socially constructed. Certainly, if it could be established that precognitive dreams represent perceptions of one's own future consciousness, this alone would have tremendous medical and scientific significance, regardless of whether premonitions could ever provide a psychic 'early warning system' of disasters yet to happen. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

ALAN MURDIE is a lawyer and writer with a longstanding interest in fortean phenomena. A former president of the Ghost Club, he compiles FT's monthly Ghostwatch column as well as being a regular feature writer.

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THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

18. UNDERGROUND LITERATURE

A recurrent trope in conspiracy literature of all kinds is the proposition that some 'truths' are so shocking or bizarre or indeed downright daft that they have to be presented as fiction. Which, unsurprisingly, is what they usually are. But there are enough people out there who by nature are prepared to go "Hmmm" for long enough to germinate first a grain of sense and then a bushel of plausibility in such tales. It seems that some have taken the fictions of Richard Sharpe Shaver seriously, and that others continue so to do to some degree or another. Shaver (1907–75) was to say the least a fascinating character, who comes across as one of those harmless lunatics who manage to rationalise their own and others' very strange ideas creatively, according to their own self-contained logic, and so perhaps avoid disappearing entirely into their own isolated worlds. That's why the man deserves to be taken seriously: as an illustration of a certain aspect of the human condition, rather than for his rather remarkable claims. He is best remembered for his idea that in underground cities there live 'deros' (detrimental robots) who have been living there for aeons and are responsible for pretty well all the ills and misfortunes of humanity (see Bruce Lanier Wright, "From Hero to Dero", **FT127:36-41**). This first appeared in print in March 1945, in *Amazing Stories* magazine, under the title "I Remember Lemuria!" To this classic text we now turn…

The story began life as a 10,000-word exposition titled "A Warning to Future Man". It described some of Shaver's former life as Mutan Mion, which he remembered in remarkable detail, and without the usual stimuli of hypnosis or trance state. Mutan lived "many thousands of years ago in Sub Atlan, one of the great cities of ancient Lemuria". This is from his foreword, so sceptical antennæ begin to twitch rather early. The story of a vanished landmass called Lemuria is itself convoluted: it started in the mid 1800s as the respectable if short-lived scientific hypothesis that a land bridge had once stretched between southern Africa and southern India, so explaining the similarity among various flora and fauna (including the lemur) in these places. After that it was, as they say, downhill all the way. In the 1880s, the matchless Helena Blavatsky single-handedly turned the land bridge into a 'lost continent' and shifted it from the Indian Ocean to the mid-Pacific, to make a nice balance with Atlantis. Others of eccentric disposition took up the theme, and Lemuria soon stretched from India to New Zealand, but at one time took up residence in the north Pacific. Just to confuse matters, JZ Knight's channelled entity Ramtha maintains he is a Lemurian and that Lemuria is but a section of Atlantis. Continental drift? More like continental kangaroo. Insofar as he may have been aware of it, Shaver solved this problem

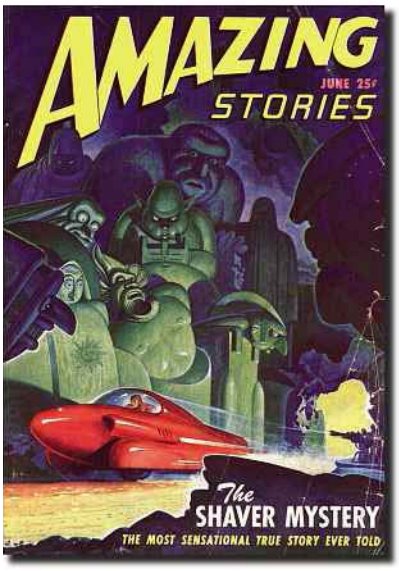
ABOVE: Richard Sharpe Shaver, explorerer of inner lost continents and subterranean mythologies.

of the scampering land by implying that Lemuria was the name for the entire Earth, and Sub Atlan was a mighty city built beneath Atlantis; indeed all cities in those days were underground. Sunlight, for reasons to be revealed, was not deemed beneficial to life.

Amazing Stories publisher Ray Palmer considered all this a bit too dry for his readers ("a dull recitation", he called it), and added another 20,000 words or so, incorporating Shaver's original 'facts' into what he thought an exciting plot. The result is a stupendous space opera, quite in keeping with *Amazing Stories'* other content (covers tended to feature scantily clad, leggy blondes with unavoidable bosoms, in poses that suggested either ecstasy or terror, or maybe both at once). Sales of the magazine jumped by about 30 per cent, and letters arrived – in the tens of thousands, Palmer claimed, unverifiably – describing readers' own experiences of the Deros, who still lurk beneath our streets and oceans and delight in mayhem and cruelty. A hard(er) core of science-fiction fans objected loudly and continuously to Shaver's tales being presented as (more or less) fact, as over the next five years scarcely an issue came out without a Lemurian story. Palmer's dedication to Shaver eventually cost him his job at *Amazing Stories*.

We won't entirely spoil your pleasure by giving away the whole tortuous plot of *I Remember Lemuria!*, but some features of Lemurian society, and Shaver's implied interests in them, bear description. For a start there is the matter of women, particularly those in the deep, deep underground city of Tean. As they increase in age, they increase in size (as do the men), but it seems the women amplify the power of their sex appeal in proportion – this regardless of the Lemurian tendency to have cross-bred with animals or otherwise modified their persons in curious ways, sometimes to no obvious advantage. On arriving in Tean, Mutan Mion is bowled over by a videophone operator: "The image of a tremendous six-armed Sybyl female filled the screen and the electrically augmented body appeal of the mighty life within her seized the youth in me and wrung it as no embrace from lesser female ever had." In the street he passes "the figure of a variform female… whose upper part was the perfect torso of a woman and whose lower part was a sinuously gliding thirty feet of brilliantly mottled snake. You could never have escaped her embrace of your own will once she had wrapped those life-generating coils around you!"

Shaver clearly finds being squeezed out of his brains by weird females an appealing prospect, and their animal aspect is surely symbolic: Shaver, one suspects, would quite like to be raped by a woman with ravening pheromones. Or at any rate psychologically crushed. When he meets Vanue, Elder Princess of Van of Nor, who is 80ft tall, he observes that her "sex aura" is "a visible iridescence flashing about her form" and "I yearned



toward that vast beauty which was not hidden for in Nor it is considered impolite to conceal the body greatly, being an offense against art and friendship to take beauty out of life. I was impelled madly toward her until I fell on my knees before her, my hands outstretched to touch the gleaming, ultra-living flesh of her feet." The girl Mutan finally falls for seems to be part pony, with a "rosy pale purple skin", cloven hoofs, and a frisky tail that he finds irresistibly sexy. All this rortiness seems to be unrelated to actual reproduction: Lemurians' (or at least Teans') progeny are grown in baby factories: Mutan visits a "great room… designed only to chemically and electronically nourish and develop the many human embryos that moved and grew in synthetically duplicated mother-blood in sealed bottles." Which is reminiscent today, and perhaps proleptic, of the 'hybrid nurseries' beloved of certain unhinged abductologists.

Then there is the Lemurians' truly bizarre science, whose basis defies logic, ancient and modern knowledge and, largely, description. Like other alternative 'sciences' it's a closed system, self-consistent but divorced from reality as commonly understood. Essentially it's founded on the binary principle of 'integration' versus 'disintegration'. The former explains why human–animal hybrids are regarded as superior creatures: "a strong integrative field with a rich exd ["energy ash… the principal content of the beneficial vibrants. It is the space dust from which all matter grows into being"] supply cause[s] all matter to grow at an increased rate, but would also cause even the most dissimilar life-gens to unite... Most of the crosses by this method had resulted in an increased strength and fertility. They now were more numerous than four-limbed men, and often superior in mental ability." Okay…

The loopiest of Lemurian lore is reserved for the nature of the Sun. Apparently it was once a mass of burning pure carbon, a kind of monstrous cosmic

> "EVERYBODY DOES HAVE A BOOK IN THEM, BUT IN MOST CASES THAT'S WHERE IT SHOULD STAY."
>
> *Christopher Hitchens*

barbecue, and this was good for everyone. Then a walloping great meteor smacked into it, and the Sun began to exude heavy-metal radiation. As a Tean professor explained it to Mutan: "The particles of radium and other radioactive metals are the poison that causes the aging of tissue. These particles are thrown out by all old suns whose shell of carbon has been partly or altogether burned away, permitting the disintegrating fire to reach and seize upon the heavy metals at the sun's core. Our sun has begun to throw out great masses of these poisonous particles. They fall upon [us] in a continual flood, entering into living tissue and infecting it with the radioactive disease we call age.

"Through the years, the centuries, these poisons accumulate in the soil of the planet, and are continually being washed out of it by the rains with the result that all the water on Mu is becoming increasingly contaminated. When these waters are drunk, the poisons accumulate in the body, finally becoming numerous enough to completely halt all growth and still worse, to prevent any effectual use of exd, which is the food of all integration."

It follows, of course, that Lemurians thus prefer to live underground, and expend enormous efforts to purify their water, albeit in ways to us that seem quaint and curious. It's equally logical that, when they discover that all this radiation has corrupted and perverted many of their number, and that they have penetrated to the heart of government, that they decide to vacate Lemuria/Earth for a planet circling a pure young star. Whether they resume their troglodytic way of life when they get there, we don't know – this is the first episode of what was to become a huge saga, after all. But we do know that some Teros ('integrated robots') were left behind, and that the Deros live on to this day, causing all the world's problems with their mind-control devices and death rays, and nabbing surface-dwellers from time to time to help with their hobbies of rape and torture.

Shaver's version of solar history and the suggestion that we owe our mortality to solar radiation is, let's say, unconventional. Shaver seems to have had a problem with daylight: the most advanced race in nearby space are the Nor, who inhabit "a group of sunless planets 0.16 light years away". No wonder we can't see them. But all Mutan's accounts of Lemurian 'science' are passing strange. "When Newton was hit on the head by an apple, it was by an apple that was pushed down upon his head, rather than pulled down; since gravity is the friction caused by the fall through matter already existent of condensing exd. Obviously a condensation is a falling together of a finely divided element into a grosser state," he explains blandly. Lemurian technology is a little more predictable: 3-D video kit, telepathy augmenters, anti-gravity devices, beam weapons, faster-than-light travel, and so on. Shaver's plea (in the Foreword) that "such great minds as Einstein, Carrel, and the late Crile check the things that I remember" and that the "final result may well stagger the science of the world" fell on remorselessly deaf ears.

Shaver said that he first became aware of the Deros in 1932, when he was 25, working in a car factory, through voices he picked up from his welding equipment. Such experiences are usually a signal of paranoid schizophrenia, and he did spend some time in a mental institution: perhaps as long as eight years. As remarked earlier, Shaver's finding an audience for his private myth-making (*alias* fantasies) may have kept him on the sociable side of madness, along with his probably cathartic dedication to painting. Allusions to his work crop up in science fiction and even in *Dungeons and Dragons* (see **FT129:53**); otherwise his influence has been minimal. Shaver was no fortean, but he did illustrate and illuminate an important corner of forteana. FT

Richard Sharpe Shaver, *I Remember Lemuria!*, Venture Press 1948; available online at www.globalgreyebooks.com/Pages/i-remember-lemuria.html. For much more fascinating material on Shaver and his work, visit www.shavertron.com.

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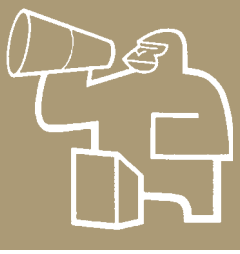


Is Donald Trump an alien?

SIMON WILSON finds the Trump presidency unexpectedly foreshadowed in Whitley Strieber's *Communion*

SIMON WILSON is a Senior Lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University, where he currently teaches on the Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred MA.

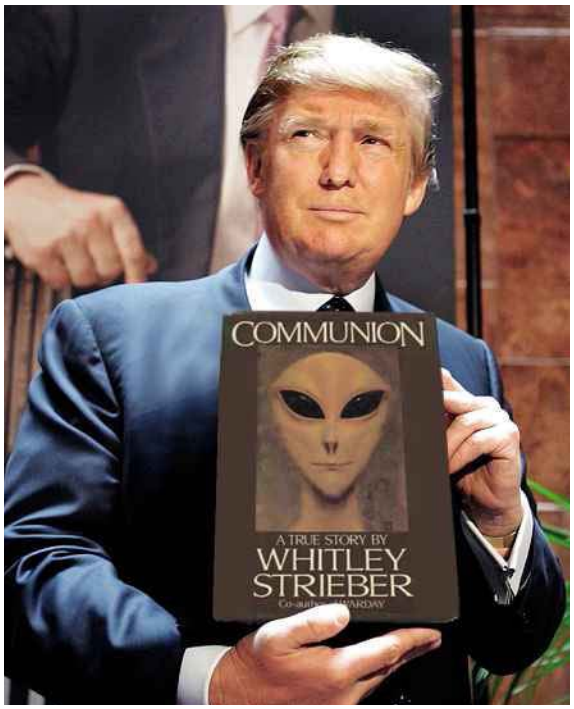
Is Donald Trump an alien? I do not mean in any literal sense, such as one might find breathlessly peddled on the Internet, supported by all manner of indistinct video footage. I mean, rather, that the alien abduction reports of the 1980s and 1990s, with their nasty little Greys doing unspeakable things to minds and bodies, seem somehow to have offered early signs and portents of his coming. They seem to have foretold the man and his message – to have been miniature versions of the life-size figure himself. And this all seems to have been understood decades ago by Whitley Strieber.

These unsettling thoughts occurred to me the other day while reading Strieber's foreword to *The Omega Project* by Kenneth Ring.[1] Strieber devotes much of it to speculating on the causes behind his terrifying but strangely enlightening experiences of alien abduction, as related most famously in his 1987 best-seller *Communion*. As ever, he is careful to repudiate the assertion that he was abducted by real, flesh and blood aliens from outer space (or, indeed, that he was abducted at all).

What caught my eye, however, was his extraordinary statement that "the coming of the UFO means, quite simply, that the curtain to the temple has been rent, and culture is about to undergo profound change."

At first sight, these words seem to be describing momentously positive changes. A whole new culture is to emerge, and with it higher levels of consciousness for those who live through the transformations. Alien abductions are the pangs of this spiritual rebirth.

The argument of Ring's book, which Strieber's words introduce, offers plenty of support for such an interpretation. Ring claims that alien abductions and near-death experiences alike are transformative events which serve to move individuals and society as a whole onto a higher evolutionary level. As a result, we will live ecologically sound lives and reject the trappings of the consumer society.



As I read Strieber's hyperbole, then, I could not help scoffing somewhat. He was writing in 1992, and one does not have to be cynical or jaded to see that culture – in its broadest as well as narrowest sense – has hardly taken a turn for the better. Celebrity-obsessed, addicted to the spectrally glowing screens of electronic media, nervously awaiting the next terrorist atrocity, we watch, with varying degrees of delight or horror, as 'truthiness' replaces informed social and political debate and thuggish insults replace truthiness.

Indeed, many evidently rejoice as something called "the élite" gets what is coming to it. Clacton, Middleburg Heights and Fréjus cheer as another boot goes in – and the biggest boot of all is currently worn by the President-elect of the USA. One can only speculate what further cultural changes he is cooking up in his Tower.

This is far from the alien-inspired New Age utopia Strieber seemed to be predicting. As I read on, however, I realised that I had been maligning him. It became apparent that in fact his torments had made him remarkably prescient about the future. His horrific "abductions" foretold precisely the kind of culture we now live in. "The emergence of the UFO phenomenon," he writes, "is, at its core, a foray into a sort of subconscious anarchy that, paradoxically, seeks some sort of control that will replace social systems that are being perceived as betrayers."

Aliens, he seems to be suggesting, are psychic symptoms of the terrors unleashed by the disintegration of a society that has lost confidence in its ideals. They reveal – "paradoxically" – that it will be by terror that we will seek to re-assert some sort of sense of control or order. "The culture has failed," he argues, "and we know it, and we are desperate to somehow survive the consequences of the failure." So desperate, it seems, that we may remain fixated on suffering and terror, rather than working through confusion and instability to possibly achieve new insights.

This thought evidently tortures Strieber as much as the aliens themselves, and he asks: "Must the liberal, expansive, hopeful, and rational view that we have spent the past 2,000 years achieving now be replaced by the cruel anarchies of the UFO phenomenon, with its message of doom and its depressing array of demonic or coldly indifferent entities?" History's answer to this agonised question has been:"Yes, it must." This becomes abundantly clear if we replace the word "UFO" in Strieber's sentence with the word "Trump."

Trump was hallucinated into existence on the back of a UFO. He is the apotheosis of the aliens. Strieber foresaw all this, and feared what he foresaw. What the aliens once did to him, Trump is now poised to do to the entire planet. FT

1. Kenneth Ring, *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992. Quotes are taken from pp18-19.

The explorer and the dancing devils

BENJAMIN RADFORD finds that US naturalist George K Cherrie's many adventures across South America included encountering numerous fortean phenomena – and perhaps even creating some of his own…

BENJAMIN RADFORD is the author or co-author of nine books on fortean topics, including *Scientific Paranormal Investigation* and *Tracking the Chupacabra*. His latest book is *Bad Clowns*.

The British Empire has spawned many of the world's greatest explorers, among them Sir Richard Burton, John Speke, Mary Kingsley, Ernest Shackleton, and Henry Morton Stanley.

But not everyone can find the source of the Nile, and there are many others whose notable accomplishments have been overshadowed by their better-known predecessors and contemporaries from across the pond. One of them is celebrated American naturalist and explorer George K Cherrie (1865–1948), who in his 1930 book *Dark Trails: Adventures of a Naturalist* (GP Putnam's Sons, 1930) wrote about his adventures, primarily in Central and South America.

Cherrie engaged in many expeditions, perhaps most famously accompanying Theodore Roosevelt on his nearly disastrous 1913–1914 jungle descent of Brazil's Rio da Dúvida ("River of Doubt", later renamed the Roosevelt River). *Dark Trails* provides a fascinating first-hand look at a prominent explorer's ethnographic, botanical, and zoological studies. Cherrie's memoir reflects a generally hard-nosed scepticism, as one would expect to find in a man of science. For example, in a section where he recounts being a witness to faith healing in a South American tribe, Cherrie could be channelling James Randi half a century later: "Of course it was a piece of crude prestidigitation. But the widespread success of such charlatanry testifies to the high value of mental suggestion; on the other hand, suggestion of evil [e.g., a curse] works with equal efficacy" (p48-49).

Amid the interesting anecdotes of exploration and scientific enterprise, Cherrie also speculates on various fortean topics, including ghost beliefs and superstitions – even, at one point, seeming to tacitly endorse what to modern eyes is clearly a version of the Vanishing Hitchhiker urban legend.

In a chapter titled "Death and After Death," Cherrie recounts for his readers a bizarre encounter with the seemingly supernatural in which he was personally involved:

"The native is always in a receptive state of mind toward supernatural things. At the slightest provocation he concludes that the Spirit of Evil is about. One summer night I reached Caicara, a tiny village nearly surrounded by jungle… We had the usual reception committee of barking dogs, naked and half-naked children and indolent natives. Some of the women had brought chickens and fruit for sale."

As it happened Cherrie recognised in this speck of a Venezuelan jungle village, "a previous acquaintance of mine, a local trader, a half-caste European who had gone native" and welcomed him. Cherrie writes:

"He led the way up a smooth path to the village, followed by a motley procession. The trader and I dined outside, waited on by his native wife who, despite an untidy one-piece costume, served us with a delicious dinner. Over our coffee I described my journey and spoke of my work collecting animals, birds, and other creatures. 'Just at present I am especially interested in night-flying insects,' I told him. 'There are an abundance of these, but they are not always the ones I want.'

'Not even with your light?' he asked. He had seen me using a lantern as a lure for insects on a previous occasion.

'Yes, I use my lantern, but somehow it doesn't always serve to attract the things I want.'

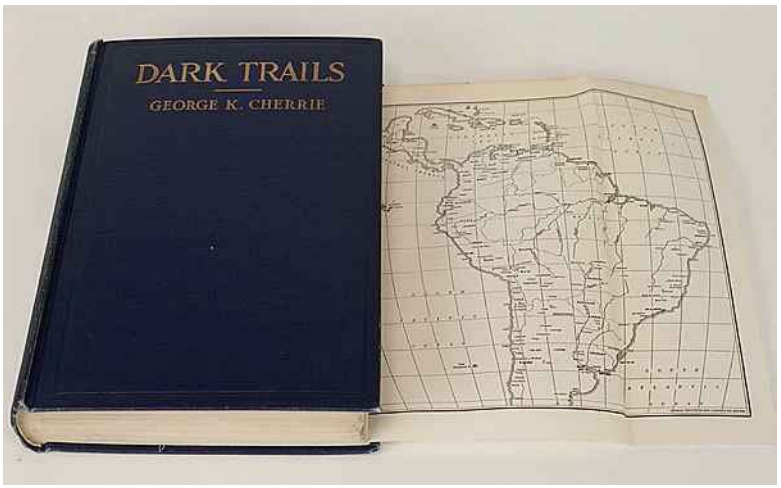
"For a few moments my friend seemed engrossed in deep thought. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet and with true Latin enthusiasm, exclaimed: 'I have it!'

"He led me by the arm to the corner of the garden from which we had a view of a rocky hillside. The entrance to the path leading to the summit was about 200 yards away across the plaza in front of the village church. In the haze of the twilight I could see near the summit of the hill what looked like a low white cloud. 'The graveyard,' whispered the trader.

"Then I remembered the local cemetery was on top of the hill and that it was surrounded by a white-washed adobe wall about 10ft high. 'Why not try your lantern on that?'

"Instantly I saw what he meant. If I could illuminate a section of the white wall it would attract multitudes of insects and when they flew within the rays of my lamp I should have them silhouetted against the white wall beyond. In this way I could identify and capture just the specimens I wanted. The trader reminded me at the same time that the villagers didn't make it a practice to visit the cemetery at night. So there was little likelihood that I would be disturbed.

"On the following night I set out just after dark, using a flashlight to follow the winding trail that led up to the burying ground. I took with me my insect net, cyanide bottles, containers of various sorts, and a large three-burner lamp which I had fastened inside a box with a reflector behind it. It was like an automobile lamp, the light being visible only from directly in front.



BELOW: Cherrie's 1930 book *Dark Trails* offers a fascinating first-hand account of his expeditions.

"When I had reached the wall it was an easy task to prop the lantern up on an old stump and light its wicks as a beacon for the moths, beetles and scores of other insects which I hoped to capture. I was not disappointed with the results. Scarcely had I turned up the first wick when I heard a buzz and, turning my head, received a stinging blow in the face. It was a head-on collision with a mole cricket! Of course I could have done my collecting by picking up such specimens as flew into the lamp if I had simply turned its rays out toward the tangled thicket about me. But this would have been a slow and unsatisfactory method and have left my choice largely to chance.

"My attention was fixed on the adobe wall in front of me. Rays from the powerful lantern illuminated a white disk on the wall fully 10ft in diameter. Between the lantern and the disk, a distance of from 15 to 20ft, was a cone of light sharply defined against the blackness of the night. Within a few seconds this cone became populated with hundreds of flying, buzzing, circling, darting insects. Could I have magnified the size of the little animals and by some magic reduced their relative speed, I should have gazed upon a graceful dance of bodies which varied both in size and colour.

"For some time I made no effort to use my net. The endless procession of whirling little bodies fascinated me. Only when a beautiful big moth circled lazily into the light and his wing-spread was shadowed large against the white wall behind him, did I make a wide sweep with my net and begin the real work of the evening.

"The simplicity and fruitfulness of my device seemed to hypnotise me. Fatigue of the day's labours fell away. In my enthusiasm I felt as if I could go on swinging my net all night long. I could not get my specimens into the containers fast enough. In fact, my gyrations, for all their clumsiness and mediocre speed, were on the order of those described by the insects themselves. Little by little I gave up the proper technique of insect netting. The graceful sweeps and twists with which I normally tried to imprison the insects in flight gave way to wild lunges and gnomelike jumps. Never in my life had I spent so riotous a time at collecting. When fatigue did come it came with a rush. I had lost all account of time. I was not even sure what I had collected. In any event, I felt it was the most successful evening's work with insects I had ever spent. Having extinguished my lantern, I made

LEFT: George K Cherrie.

"The endless procession of whirling little bodies fascinated me"

my way slowly back to my lodgings and dropped contentedly into my hammock.

"The Sun was just breaking through the mist over the river when I awakened. But instead of the Sun's rays awakening me, it was the sound of many footsteps and excited voices outside my door. Sliding out of my hammock, I hurried over to a hole in the wall that gave a view of the street. What I saw was a surprise to me. The somnolent little village had suddenly come to life. Little groups of excited, gesticulating people held my astonished gaze. My first thought was another revolution. The only thing the setting lacked was a 'general' on horseback.

"My morning coffee came, also my host, accompanied by an old man whom I recognised as one of the important elders of the settlement. The look on my host's face was a curious mixture of emotions which I could not decipher. After bidding me good morning he turned to the old man and began a colloquy something like this: 'You say the whole village is in a panic?'

'Yes. The place has lost its peace for the first time since the great plague.'

'And why should the people be so distressed?'

The old man excitedly related the terrible details. 'It was late when we saw the first light,' he said. 'This light could only have been that of the Evil One. No man's torch was ever so bright. It illuminated only one spot and that on the wall about the sainted dead. In its gleam danced many demons. One would disappear and another quickly take its place. Only devils from hell ever danced so fearfully.'

'How large would you say this demon was?' asked my host.

'Oh, of colossal size; with very long arms and legs.'

'Did he have a tail?'

'Opinion is divided. Some say they saw it plainly. Others not.'

"After a good deal of cross-examination the trader permitted the old man to go. Then he turned to me with a laugh, saying: 'So you're a devil – nay, a whole pack of devils!' He caught his breath presently. 'With a *tail*!' he laughed. But of a sudden he became serious, and warned me not to admit that I had had anything to do with the phenomenon. He explained that if I succeeded in convincing the villagers I had been up at the cemetery the night before they would also be convinced that I was in league with Satan himself, and so not to be trusted. As violence to a white man on some such pretext was a not unheard-of occurrence I was glad to take advantage of his advice and keep silent."

Cherrie's choice to remain silent about the true nature of the phantasmagorical sight was a wise one. Longtime readers of *Fortean Times* well know that rumours – especially involving outsiders – can have dire consequences in the developing world. In my articles and research into organ snatching legends, for example, (see "Kidney Devils," **FT138:34-39**) I found several examples of innocent Westerners being accused of witchcraft and other evil deeds based on little more than just such a sighting. And mob-led killings of suspected witches (and others assumed to be in league with the Devil) continue to the present day in countries such as Brazil, India, and Tanzania.

One wonders what beliefs and legends Cherrie's nocturnal entomological antics may have accidentally spawned in the region; it would be fascinating to return to Caicara and interview local elders about the colossal, long-limbed and tailed demon seen dancing with swarming devils in an unholy light in a cemetery a century ago… FT

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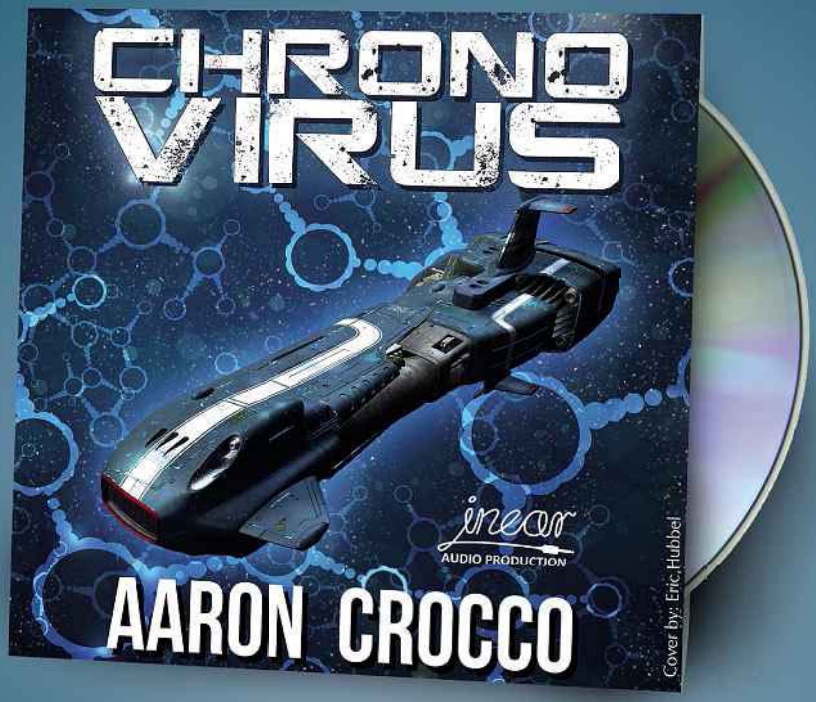

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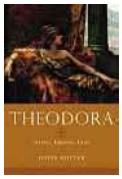
This month's books, films and games

reviews

Ain't she just Theodorable?

A witty biography of Theodora – courtesan turned empress of the man accused of murdering a trillion people turned saint – encapsulates the events of her period



Theodora

Actress, Empress, Saint

David Potter

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 277pp, illus, maps, bib, ind, $29.95, ISBN9780199740765

Another Theodora biography? We have half a dozen, though those by Bridge, Browning and Underhill are not mentioned here. Theodora also stars in the swelling number of feminist surveys of Byzantine empresses.

Still, Potter – a distinguished ancient historian – provides a lucid, jargon-free and often witty account that ranges far beyond straight biography to a wide-ranging, detailed panorama of cultural, military, political and religious events and personalities, both influencing and influenced by our heroine.

Potter fortifies his cleanly-printed text with 30 pages of end-notes; an 11-page bibliography with some omissions and the odd error; a mainly onomastic index; *dramatis personæ* and timeline; and a dozen maps and illustrations, though only one gives a glimpse of Theodora from her famous Ravenna mosaics.

Theodora fans face the $64,000 question: how to take her contemporary Procopius's *Secret History*: Potter dubs it "a collection of scandalous misrepresentations"; others take it as an example of Byzantine *samizdat* pamphleteering. I'm drawn to Averil Cameron's notion that it is satire.

Whatever the intent, it is readable – and notorious for lubricious details of Theodora's hectic sex life as a prostitute, then as a *grande horizontale*. Potter provides the full Monty, but never admits that she is simply a woman who liked sex and was exceptionally good at it.

Traditional hyperbole attends. Potter cites – thanks, Dave! – my 'Sexual rhetoric in Procopius', pointing to the same stories being told about, for instance, Roman empress Messalina.

Before we dismiss them, consider (*Spectator*, May 22, 1999) Annabel Chung who "for purposes of a sociological study" had sex with 251 men in 10 hours whilst keeping her lawyer's day job.

When Gibbon famously wrote of Theodora's sexploits: "But her murmurs, her pleasures and her arts, must be veiled in the obscurity of a learned language" (Latin), this was not prudery, but a dig at the 1623 first edition, which left out the racy stories, as did the 1663 Paris one. Potter notes that Gibbon found "gold mixed in with the manure". Runciman blamed Constantinople's climate for its inhabitants' 'melancholy', whereas Byron opined: "What men called gallantry, and Gods adultery / Is much more common where the climate's sultry."

Potter steers us from Theodora's early life in the city's raffish world of bear-keepers and actresses and subsequent bed-hopping, to her meeting with and marrying the future emperor Justinian – a complex character superbly delineated by Potter. Theodora, now outwardly respectable, often dominated in their joint reign except in

> **"...imagine Britain under the joint sway of Rowan Williams and Millwall supporters"**

religious matters – she was a theological as well as a sexual maverick – until her death in 548. This is often attributed to breast cancer, although the one source – not Procopius but the Latin chronicler Victor Tunnensis – does not specify her disease as such. If it was that scourge of women, she'd be perhaps the earliest documented case, though archæologists have detected skeletal indications from earlier periods, cf. (e.g.) Fred Harding, *Breast Cancer*, 2007.

Sports fans will relish the space lavished on chariot-racing and fanatic devotees of the Blues and Greens (including the royals) who combined English-style hooliganism with running affairs of state in tandem with the Church – imagine Britain under the joint sway of Rowan Williams and Millwall supporters.

Some might classify Theodora's boudoir epics as quasi-fortean. Other exotic items – some in Potter, others not – include Justinian's floating head, his killing of one trillion people, the bizarre dietary and sexual prescriptions of fashionable quack Herophilus, Emperor Zeno's lack of kneecaps allowing him to outrace chariots, and arch-heretic Arius exploding Mr Creosote-style in a public lavatory (**FT133:17**).

The last chapter explores Theodora's cultural Nachleben, special attention going to Sarah Bernhardt in Sardou's 1884 play. Potter could have done more here. I easily instance novels by Robert Graves and Stephanie Thornton, the long-running mystery series by Eric Meyer & Mary Reed, and – the classiest piece of cinematic rhubarb – the German-inspired *Last Roman* (1968), with Sylvia Koscina as Theodora and Orson Welles as Justinian, plus Honor Blackman, not here challenging the empress as Byzantium's *Pussy Galore*. There was also Charles Busch's 1984 New York play, *Theodora – She-Bitch of Byzantium*. Add, too, her presence in Judy Chicago's feminist crockery set, 'The Dinner Party'.

There are few sins of commission, though it is mealy-mouthed to talk of Constantine's wife Fausta merely "deceasing" when he had her suffocated in a sauna, also sheer *mumpsimus* (after Alan Cameron's classic article) to continue believing Justinian closed down Plato's Academy in 529.

Potter doesn't pursue what I consider the obvious modern parallel: Eva/Evita Peron, who slept her way to a controversial marriage with Colonel Perón, a joint rule that saw her championing the poor in charitable (including Theodora-style rescuing of 'fallen women') and political ways, before also dying young of cancer.

Perhaps Theodora is best summed up by actress Sharon Stone: "Having a vagina and a point of view is a lethal combination."

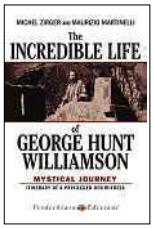
Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict

DAVID POTTER IS NO HARRY BUT HE HAS HIS OWN BRAND OF MAGIC **9**

A saucerful of secrets

Witnessing Adamski's encounter with a Venusian is only one act of an eventful life – it's a pity Williamson's biography is not definitive



The Incredible Life of George Hunt Williamson

Mystical Journey: Itinerary of a Privileged UFO Witness

Michel Zirger & Maurizio Martinelli

Verdechiaro Edizioni 2016
Pb, 395pp, illus, bib, $21.99, ISBN 9788866232629

If 1950s flying-saucer culture produced a more fascinatingly complex character than George Hunt Williamson (1926–1986), that name does not come to mind. Perhaps the least of it, though that's not easy to believe, is that he was among the six witnesses to George Adamski's fabled meeting with a Venusian in the California desert on 20 November 1952. While that alone would have assured him immortality in saucer legend, it was to Williamson only a passing moment in a melodramatic career spent on the mid-century fringes.

Back then, if you were part of the contactee crowd, you couldn't toss a stone without hitting Williamson: North and South America, Europe, Asia, hobnobbing with tribal peoples, channelling alien communications, constructing rich histories of lost advanced civilisations, conjuring up ancient astronauts more than a decade before Erich von Däniken profited from them. In 1960, after renaming himself Michel d'Obrenovic (to honour Serbian royal ancestors), he dropped out of sight. Many thought he had died, but he lived on, a California resident married for a time to a Hollywood actress, until January 1986, still quietly pursuing his many outside-the-mainstream interests and laying plans to re-emerge with new books following up on the earlier ones.

Only those with long memories recall him now. Two who remember better than most are the authors of *The Incredible Life of George Hunt Williamson*, Michel Zirger (a Frenchman who lives in Tokyo) and Maurizio Martinelli (an Italian). They have produced the first attempt at a Williamson biography. One hopes, frankly, that somebody more skilled in the art of biography takes up the project down the road. Still, *Incredible Life* told me much I, a Williamson admirer, didn't know.

The authors have done their research, but they haven't organised it well. One longs for a linear narrative rather than near-random skips in time and space. Sometimes it's hard to grasp how one idea or adventure followed another. Also the authors are … well, believers, which means they embrace even Williamson's most outlandish ideas and experiences. Not that one would want a debunking book, of course; Williamson's extraordinarily creative imagination merits unironic respect, so long as one understands that what went on in his brain and what happened in consensus reality did not always occupy the same space.

Zirger and Martinelli establish what all thoughtful observers – prominently excluding American UFO personality James W Moseley, who engaged in a strange decades-long campaign of slander, even charging (falsely) that Williamson murdered his first wife – can agree on: Williamson was an unusually intelligent man and a sincere one. I would have loved to hear first-hand about his association with Dorothy Martin and the Laugheads (under pseudonyms, the leading characters in the celebrated sociological treatise *When Prophecy Fails*), the genesis of his ideas about early space visitors, his channelling, his observations about Adamski. Though their association was short (they parted company in part over the efficacy of channelled contacts, which Adamski rejected in favour of physical ones), Williamson never seems to have doubted Adamski's truthfulness. The present authors, taking the same view, regale us with further esoteric speculations, first aired in Williamson's 1957 book *Other Tongues – Other Flesh*, concerning the symbols visible in Venusian footprints Williamson preserved in the aftermath of the supposed 1952 encounter. Here, as at other points where the authors step into especially wide-eyed realms, the reader's attention will wander elsewhere.

Even when I first read UFO and saucer books (two separate genres) as an adolescent, Adamski's tales struck me as feeble science fiction. Today, I am able to accept that he may have been sincere about something. It wasn't, however, about Venusians, "scoutship" photographs, and trips into outer space. Williamson always said that he had witnessed the desert meeting with Orthon – the name later given the then-unmonickered Space Brother – from a mile away. Nobody, including the authors of the present volume, seems to have asked if that is physically possible, though it's true that Williamson testified only that he saw Adamski talking with a "figure" (still…). The footprints, on the other hand, had to have been prepared beforehand. The book doesn't address this and other obvious questions, as a more critically minded biography would do. Nonetheless, this often informative volume will have to do till the real thing comes along.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

A FANTASTIC LIFE DESERVES BETTER – BUT WHAT A FANTASTIC LIFE… **7**

Lord of Strange Deaths

The Fiendish World of Sax Rohmer

Eds: Phil Baker & Antony Clayton,

Strange Attractor Press 2015
Hb, 367pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, ISBN 9781907222252

So, Dr Fu Manchu, we meet again… This collection of essays often astounds, amazes and amuses, but it's a mixed bag.

Arthur Henry Ward (1883–1959), aka Sax Rohmer, remains a cipher. His most famous creation birthed in the romance and foggy squalor of Limehouse opium dens, lived long enough to take part in the age of flying saucers, thanks to his magical elixir. Fu Manchu – equal parts Arthur Conan Doyle and imperialism – can perhaps be excused as an example of the casual racism of his era's birth, but as decades passed he has become increasingly embarrassing. The problem is that Rohmer was such a damned good storyteller! How can we sit down to consume his literary feast, while setting aside the entrée?

Many of the essays are apologist (read "context"). The most shallow entry is by Alan Moore, co-creator of *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman*. At its best, however, nuggets of pure research call for a complete reassessment of Rohmer. His persona, for example, was not created to be a vaguely occultist literary figure. Instead, Ward created his pseudonym to write music hall doggerel.

Contributing writer Christopher Frayling places Ward/Rohmer so firmly in the music hall tradition that it's difficult to see Fu Manchu as anything but yet another – far more ambitious – turn upon the stage whose popularity surprised even its author.

Frayling has redefined Rohmer, who essentially co-created 'Little Tich', the music hall luminary Harry Relph.

Lord of Strange Deaths is a largely interpretative celebration of Fu Manchu. Rohmer will remain a mystery, yet the authors and editors have perhaps allowed the evil genius to be revisited

and enjoyed in context by a new generation.
Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict
THE DOGGEREL MERCHANT BEHIND FU MANCHU REVEALED **8**

Ireland's Immortals

A History of the Gods of Irish Myth

Mark Williams

Princeton University Press 2016

Hb, 608pp, illus, bib, gloss, ind, $39.50, £29.95,
ISBN 9780691157313

Late Celtic Era scholars and forteans may know Mark Williams's *Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales, 700–1700*, in which he merged archæology and Celtic poetry, and slew some dragons of pseudo-scholarship along the way. He makes clear that native Irish gods emerge not from creation myths but from an enigmatic and patchy archæological record; the earliest written evidence comes from early Christian sources, as part of their co-option of the pagan deities. The new mythologies in the middle mediæval period necessitated a narrative to integrate biblical, native and classical sources, and pagan gods were transformed into the last pre-Gaelic, prehistoric people to have conquered Ireland. The Tuatha Dé Danann are cast down from Heaven to become human or, perhaps (given their later fairy incarnation), fallen angels. In the Celtic revivals of Ireland and Scotland, the mysticism of Yeats and Russel were central to the modern redefinition of the Pagan pantheon. Augusta Gregory in *Gods and Fighting Men* wrote the definitive (pseudo-) history of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were transformed once more, this time into Fairy Folk behind "hidden walls" that they could see and pass through.

Ireland's Immortals is academic but enormously entertaining. It comes with a pronunciation guide and scholarly apparatus.
Páiric O'Corráin

Fortean Times Verdict
ARCHÆOLOGY, POETRY, HISTORY, PSEUDO-HISTORY, MYSTICISM… **9**

Non-science fiction

The symbiotic genres of science fiction and pseudoscience aim to entertain… but readers tend not to believe SF is true

Pseudoscience and Science Fiction

Andrew May

Springer Books 2016

Pb, 181pp, illus, refs, ind, £15.00 (£11.99 ebook),
ISBN 9783319426044

Robert Heinlein once tried to explain science fiction (SF) as 'realistic speculation about future events'. Others have tried to define it as a combination of science, romance and prophecy. In this meticulously researched and richly illustrated book Andrew May defines SF as any work of fiction 'that stretches the reader's imagination beyond the current limits of science'. Common SF motifs such as spaceships, aliens, ESP and voyages to other worlds and dimensions also figure prominently in books, TV programmes and films that describe themselves as 'non-fiction'. In bookshops, the output of writers such as Erich von Däniken, Whitley Strieber and Tim Good are categorised under 'paranormal', 'unexplained phenomena', or 'mind, body and spirit', not as science fiction. Yet despite sharing similar themes and obsessions – and occasionally the same authors – the two genres (if they can be thus described) tip-toe around each other; never the twain shall meet. Why should this be so is an interesting question.

Few studies have tried to understand why this dichotomy exists. In my own experience friends who enjoy reading SF don't tend to be familiar with, or sympathetic to, the contents of books about UFOs and 'unexplained phenomena' because they regard them as 'un-scientific'. On the other hand, others who accept UFO stories as evidence of ET or paranormal visitations tend to regard aliens, flying saucers, mind control and faster-than-light travel not as theoretical possibilities – or fictional science – but as actual facts. May argues that popular non-fiction writings should be more accurately labelled pseudoscience, "not because [their] assertions are false (although they often are), but because they are arrived at by non-scientific method".

Andrew May has read extensively in both genres and explains that SF and pseudoscience have little in common with academic science beyond their subject matter and the superficial jargon they employ. What they do share is the desire to entertain and to please their audience. The difference in the case of pseudoscience is the audience tend to have a 'will to believe'. As a result, both have cross-fertilised each other, with SF authors drawing upon popular pseudoscientific theories to add credibility to their plots. Fort's writings and wilder speculations have been a particularly rich source of ideas for the early SF writers. For example, Eric Frank Russell drew upon Fort's idea of the Earth as 'property' in his 1939 novel *Sinister Barrier*, a book he described as 'a work of fiction based on fact'. May notes that Whitley Strieber used a very similar phrase to introduce his 1989 novel *Majestic* that was presented as a fictional narrative based upon a real historical event: the crash of an unidentified 'something' at Roswell in 1947.

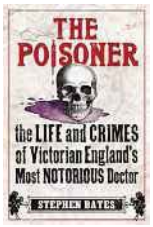
Pseudoscience has in turn borrowed from, or been influenced by, SF. The most obvious example is the on-going symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and the UFO industry. The most bizarre is the conspiracy theory of 'predictive programming' that divines hidden agendas behind blockbuster SF movies like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Arrival*, placed there by some shadowy elite to prepare the public for future revelations concerning future ET contacts. Each chapter of this excellent book examines sub-genres that overlap between science and pseudoscience, beginning with Fort and pulp magazines of the early 20th century, tracing the pseudoscientific ideas and beliefs inspired. Tracing the history of these ideas, May inevitably finds a rich seam of literary antecedents for modern pseudoscientific speculations in the stories published by Hugo Gernsback, John W Campbell and Ray Palmer, whose clever promotion of the 'Shaver mystery' and flying saucers did much to influence the future direction of ufology.

Other chapters examine high-tech paranoia, mind-power, space drives and anti-gravity, ancient astronauts, conspiracy theories and End Times prophecies. What becomes apparent is that topics such as timeslips, alien invasions, aircraft abducted by aliens, ancient technology and End Times prophecies were all anticipated by science fiction authors before a significant number of people claimed these things were true or, indeed, had happened to them. May does a fine job of tearing down the artificial barriers between the two genres and his exploration of the similarities and differences that exist between stories that we habitually categorise as 'fact' and 'fiction' will be a revelation to both newcomers and to seasoned researchers alike.
David Clarke

Fortean Times Verdict
LUCID ACCOUNT OF THE LINKS BETWEEN FICTION & 'NON-FICTION' **9**

A prince among men

Skint toff, family deaths, insurance fraud, popular press, pitch-black comedy – William Palmer was a perfect modern baddie



The Poisoner

The Life and Crimes of Victorian England's Most Notorious Doctor

Stephen Bates

Duckworth Overlook 2015

Pb, 342pp, illus, refs, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9780715649572

In 1856, William Palmer, of Rugeley, Staffordshire, was tried at the Old Bailey for having poisoned his friend John Cook at Rugeley's Talbot Inn the previous year. He was found guilty and publicly hanged at Stafford gaol. Palmer was suspected of having poisoned up to a dozen other people (including his wife, brother and mother-in-law), the motive invariably being to cash in on life insurance policies he had hastily taken out against his unfortunate victims' lives.

Ostensibly a respectable doctor, Palmer was actually a fully paid-up member of England's gambling, womanising demi-monde. Many of these ne'er-do-wells had inherited and squandered money. Palmer was no different. Having disposed of a not-insubstantial bequest, he proceeded to run up enormous debts. At the time of the Cook murder, he owed some £25,000 – around £1.5m today; 170 years ago, a gentleman's word was sufficient to enable him to borrow such sums.

Engagingly written, with a wry humour (the young Palmer, having eloped with a sweetheart, gets only as far as Walsall – "not necessarily the most romantic of destinations even then."), the book begins with Palmer in the death cell at Stafford gaol during his last night on Earth, whilst excursion trains from as far away as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham bring so many people to Stafford to witness his hanging that the town's population of 15,000 was swollen to twice its normal size.

As to why the case was such a media sensation at the time, Bates explains how newspapers were suddenly enjoying greatly increased circulation figures; the previous year, the abolition of stamp duty and taxes on advertisements had led to a marked reduction in newspapers' prices. But the case itself had several features which made it the perfect news story. Journalists attending the trial remarked upon Palmer's inoffensive and unremarkable facial features; previously, criminals had been believed to be easily recognisable by their villainous demeanour. Here was something novel and, as such, it may be read as a literary device, a disturbing twist in the 'plot' to shock and unsettle its readers. Reportage of the story as real-life melodrama ran parallel to the current vogue for serialised sensation novels, often featuring murder. Poisoning was fast becoming known as the archetypal English mode of murder. An insurance company's investigation into the death of Palmer's wife – suspiciously, after only only a single premium had been paid – constituted a further blurring of fact and fiction. Their inspector was one Charles Field, a former policeman, and something of a celebrity detective at the time, being the inspiration for Dickens's Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*.

The London correspondent for the *New York Times* saw the case as a crime facilitated by the innovations of progress, recently-discovered strychnine and life insurance policies. The media furore surrounding Palmer's crimes was unprecedented, anticipating that of Jack the Ripper. This thoroughly-researched book, which includes previously unseen letters from Palmer, is full of memorable and striking details. Cook's horrific death – with convulsions causing hands to clench, eyes to bulge from their sockets, and an agonisingly arched back – was such that when his body was laid out, his limbs had to be tied down with string before he would fit in the coffin.

Cook's post-mortem is portrayed as having elements of black comedy amidst the horror. It took place in the Talbot Arms' assembly room, not an unusual practice at the time. From the start, it was shambolic; the surgeon appointed to conduct the post-mortem arrived without his surgical instruments, thinking he was there only to witness the proceedings, which Palmer made various near-farcical attempts to disrupt.

Cook's internal organs were placed in a jar to be sent to London for analysis by Professor Alfred Taylor of Guy's Hospital, the pre-eminent pathologist and poisons expert at the time. Palmer, amongst the throng who were milling around the table, unsuccessfully sought to steal the jar. Before this, he had attempted to jostle the surgeon who was dissecting Cook's body.

Bates concludes with a visit to the present-day Talbot Arms, now having changed its name but still a pub. It has come down in the world, gaining local notoriety for having more bouncers than drinkers. The current landlord allows Bates to inspect the room where Cook died, where he finds no atmosphere or presence, despite some tales of ghostly activity in the pub.

Still today notorious as the Prince of Poisoners, Palmer lives on in other ways than the supernatural.

Christopher Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict

HE LOOKED LIKE SUCH A NICE MAN, THE PRINCE OF POISONERS **9**

Everything You Know about London is Wrong

Matt Brown

Batsford 2016

Hb, 192pp, illus, bib, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9781849943604

Matt Brown is the editor-at-large of Londonist (londonist.com/), a grab-bag of London miscellany – history, news and must-go events – and a guaranteed time-suck. And now he's debunked some of my favourite factoids (or 'lies', if you're feeling judgmental) in a short and very snappy book that starts by stating that London does not exist. The City of London and the City of Westminster do, but they make up only 1.5 per cent of the area of Greater London, a ceremonial county and the administrative term for our collection of towns.

Disappointingly, the model of Napoleon's nose, which passing squaddies tweak for luck, and the Seven Noses of Soho, which bring infinite wealth to the people who find them, are the work of guerrilla artist Rick Butler and casts of his own nose rather than historical artefacts. It's not illegal to die within the Houses of Parliament.

Panto hero Dick Whittington probably did not have a cat ("Oh yes, he did…" "Oh no, he didn't"), but he was responsible for the Whittington Longhouse, a 128-seat public lavatory. The basement of the Viaduct Tavern does not include cells from Newgate Prison. The seats on the Underground may well contain traces of semen, fæces, vomit and the other components of a decent Friday night out, but the *Science* reference quoted is untraceable. The rose-ring parakeets that now plague London weren't released by Jimi Hendrix or escapees from the set of *The African Queen*. And Aphex Twin does not live in the grey box in the middle of the Elephant roundabout; it's a memorial to Michael Faraday.

An unchallenging book, but fun.

Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict

DRAT… BANG GO YOUR FAVOURITE ANECDOTES FOR TOURISTS **7**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

The Menagerie of Marvels

Karl Shuker

CFZ Publishing Group 2016
Pb, 265pp, illus, bib, ind, £7.99, ISBN 9781909488205

FT regular Dr Karl Shuker's third compendium spans animal mythology and the rarest cryptozoology in 22 articles, the majority previously unpublished. He tells of the 'reverse mermaid' (fishy head and female legs), which was claimed in 1973 to have been caught off Egypt and was widely believed there to be real. It was a hoax based upon René Magritte's 1935 painting 'Collective Imagination'. An account of the Shamir, a tiny worm-like creature with a laser-like gaze, also caught our eye. It remained under guard in the Garden of Eden and emerged only when God borrowed it to etch the names of the tribes of Israel onto gems in their high priests' breastplates. There are too many cryptobeasts to list: our favourites were the Earth Hound of Scotland, which looks like a mole-rat/pig cross); unidentified marine carcases found on the south coast; the 'giant rat of Sumatra', as mentioned in a Sherlock Holmes story; Argentina's armoured fairy armadillo; and flying (gliding, really) toads. Excellent.

Meet the Hybrids

Miguel Mendonça & Barbara Lamb

www.meetthehybrids.wordpress.com 2015
Pb, 287pp, bib, £11.99, ISBN 9781518741012

This anthology references the Akashic Record, the Third Eye, Gaia, raising consciousness, and encounters with spiritual as well as extraterrestrial entities.

The authors make a serious effort to present and analyse interviews with eight people who believe they are human–alien hybrids and to whom are put 10 questions about how they came to this conclusion and how it might have changed their lives and outlooks.

Their comments on the latter aspect says more about this crazy world we live on than about UFOs or aliens. This is preceded by a clear analysis of the issue of hybrids in history and in UFO literature. The last part of the book tackles the issues that are raised by the testimony of the interviewees. When one says that her mother was impregnated with an embryo composed of her mother's egg, her father's sperm and two types of ET DNA so she is "38% Anunnaki and 28% Zeta"; when another claims to have been "off communing with ETs since the age of 6", it certainly seems wrong to be dismissive; in fact the authors react more like psychiatrists to the uninhibited comments of their couched clients. From their early days they feel "different", are relieved to find others like themselves, worry that their hybrid relatives might be being "weaponised" by "the military" and so on; but all say consistently that this is part of a process of healing the Earth and that a day will come "soon" when their alien parents and "star families" will reveal themselves openly. Is this part of an unconscious but growing development in the psychology of modern man as Whitley Strieber and Jeffrey Kripal believe? We don't know!

America

Nation of the Goddess

Alan Butler & Janet Wolter

Destiny Books 2015
Pb, 353pp, illus, bib, ind, £9.95, ISBN 9781620553978

A while back books exposing 'secret histories' came thick and fast, but this is the first we've seen for a while and concerns a fraternal organisation of American farmers – The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange), formed after the US Civil War to promote the interests of rural communities. It successfully lobbyied local and national government to pass significant legislation (eg. Farm Credit and free rural mail delivery) and pushed causes such as temperance and female suffrage. Its founders included Freemasons, and the early organisation adopted Masonic-style rituals and incorporated elements of Greek and Roman mythology. It is these latter elements that inspire the authors' argument that there was an underlying agenda to elevate the divine feminine values – they use the term 'Venus families' – in a 'secret' lineage they claim to have traced back to the mysteries of Eleusis. The authors demonstrate how the Grange influenced the Founding Fathers, the Revolutionary War and the design of America's sacred monuments and city plans. There is even a link to the lore of Rosslyn Chapel and the Templars. Nearly every American city "has a temple to the Goddess hidden in plain sight" say the authors – the baseball diamond on an enclosed playfield. It is well argued and will interest the followers of sacred geometry.

Crystal Skulls

Judy Hall

Red Wheel / Weiser 2016
PB, 197pp, notes, illus, bib, $16.95, ISBN 9781578635948

Ever since Anna Mitchell-Hedges claimed, in Honduras in 1924, to have discovered the most famous of the many humanoid skulls carved in quartz crystal, these enigmatic objects have become the home of all sorts of claims for supernatural doings. Their followers lap up the stories – the wilder the better – and Gaia worship. Judy Hall, a "trained healer" and Skullkeeper, peppers this slender book with often interesting nuggets of skull history and folklore, but they are lost in a twee guide to owning and using skulls for those who think this is a real subject. Skullkeepers are shown how to commune with their new noggins and let them tell you their true names, or rather those of the entities that inhabit them. And you can buy skulls ready populated! The handy closing compendium includes sections on different quartzes and their properties, totemic animal shapes, and recommends Z14 which "clears fourteen layers of the etheric" to clean your skull.

Shamanism

Christa Mackinnon

Hay House Basics 2016
PB, 285pp, notes, ind, £8.99, ISBN 9781781805879

In the traditions of most historical cultures, shamans claim to have been 'chosen', undergoing a psychological and spiritual crisis, during which their body, mind, personality or 'soul' is symbolically dismembered and rebuilt. This metamorphosis is imposed upon them over long periods of time to facilitate communion with spirits and to journey into the Otherworld – and is studied by folklorists, anthropologists and psychologists. The type of shamanism referred to by Mackinnon and similar guides to 'shamanism' caters for those who, for whatever reason, want to use 'shamanistic' ideas, rituals and imagery, to be like, well, shamans, whom they visualise as noble spiritual warriors. It is indulged in as a New Age lifestyle choice. Consequently the chapters are about choosing (or 'designing') your behaviour, thought processes, outlook, even your spirituality to fit an image of yourself you may think desirable. While the involuntary shaman is transformed into being a valuable part of an archaic society (yet usually placed on the periphery), the modern Western 'shaman' aims to integrate better within today's fast-moving and self-obsessed world.

To be fair to Christa Mackinnon (a psychologist and hypnotherapist), she claims to have undergone her own spiritual dismemberment and subsequent re-training. While it adds nothing to our understanding of authentic shamanism, it is well written, and fairly comprehensive, with most of the 'ritual' aspects drawn from Amerindian culture, modern Wicca and self-help routines. This will be of interest only to those wanting to take a journey with her or, as she puts it, if you need "meaning" brought back into your life.

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

Tutankhamun

Dir Peter Webber, UK 2016

ITV Studios Home Entertainment, £14.99 (DVD)

ITV's four-part drama Tutankhamun impresses on a number of levels. The setting is stunning, despite the Valley of the Kings being filmed in South Africa. The characterisation is interesting, in that the leading characters are shown as heavily flawed. And the plot – well, I don't need to worry about spoilers!

Max Irons (Edward IV in *The White Queen*) is excellent as the tetchy and obsessive Howard Carter, who constantly has to be reminded to be polite to people – or even to notice them. Sam Neill (*Peaky Blinders*, *The Tudors*) plays Lord Carnarvon, the maverick aristocrat who knows little of how archæology works, but as a gambler is prepared to sink his money into funding Carter.

It's probably naïve to expect a TV drama about an historical event to stick closely to reality, and some critics have slammed it for this. Howard Carter was in his late 40s when he discovered King Tutankhamun's tomb, but Max Irons (son of Jeremy Irons and Sinéad Cusack) is only 31. Fair enough, the drama begins in 1905, and he doesn't find the tomb till 1922, and it's probably easier for make-up artists to make an actor look older than younger – but he still looks young for the role.

More serious is Carter's affair with Lord Carnarvon's young daughter Evelyn (Amy Wren, Bethany Brassington in *Silk*). Considering the real-life Evelyn was born in 1901, she was only just of age at the very end of the story, and probably only 17 or less when they got together. The present-day Lord Carnarvon insists the friendship between Carter and his great-aunt was purely platonic – but writer Guy Burt has said there was a "persistent rumour" of a romance between them. It's probably more the case that you can't have a costume drama without a bit of sex. Before Lady Evelyn there's a (probably fictional) American archæologist from the New York Metropolitan Museum, Maggie Lewis (Catherine Steadman, Mabel Lane Fox in *Downton Abbey*), who again isn't put off by Carter's irascible nature.

But some of the odder details in this mini-series are definitely based on fact. There's a delightful moment when Carter goes in search of the famous archæologist and probably the first Egyptologist Flinders Petrie (character actor Rupert Vansitartt) – who emerges from his dig stark naked. Petrie often dug in the nude to ensure he wouldn't be pestered by tourists – a nuisance which plagued Carter throughout his time in Egypt.

Despite the scorn of other archæologists Howard Carter is determined to find the tomb of a lost king, and eventually his intuition and years of experience lead him to it; there's a magical moment when he first looks through a hole into a room that hasn't been opened for millennia, and discovers "wonderful things". But Carter's digging is interrupted by the First World War, and then politics get in the way again when the Egyptian authorities turn against the British.

And then Lord Carnavon's death, from blood poisoning from an infected insect-bite, triggers the nonsense which is still with us today – "the curse of Tutankhamun's tomb" – created out of whole cloth, the drama makes clear, by the sensation-hungry press.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
SEXED-UP BUT FUN PORTRAYAL OF DOGGED PERSISTENCE **8**

Agent Carter: The Complete Second Season

Created by Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely, US 2016

Walt Disney Studios, £19.99 (Blu ray), £14.99 (DVD)

It's doubtful that anyone at Marvel Studios envisaged Agent Carter – wartime SOE operative and Steve Rogers's English girlfriend – enjoying a further career after her appearance in the 2011 *Captain America* film, but there was something about Peggy... Fans couldn't get enough of her, and she continued to show up on screens big and small until last year, which witnessed the double whammy of her preseny-day funeral in *Captain America: Civil War* and the cancellation of her 1940s-set ABC TV series following disappointing ratings for its second season. That was a great shame, as fangirls and boys have made clear in any number of online petitions, but at least we can now enjoy what may well be Peg's last outing on Blu ray.

This time around, the action shifts from the Strategic Scientific Reserve's New York headquarters to sunny Los Angeles, where Agent Sousa (Enver Gjokaj) is now running the SSR's West Coast office and Howard Stark (Dominic

Cooper) and loyal butler Jarvis (James D'Arcy) are installed in one of the playboy inventor's many mansions. Peggy Carter (Hayley Atwell) flies in to help out with a baffling case involving a frozen lady in the lake, and soon finds herself embroiled not just in murder but political conspiracy, atomic age scientific skulduggery and a threat from what might be the Dark Dimension glimpsed in *Doctor Strange*.

There's less emphasis on taking down everyday sexism than in the first series – after all, we know by now that Peggy knows her worth. Sexual politics are still to the fore, though, thanks to a pair of fantastically twisted femmes fatale in the form of Whitney Frost (Wynn Everett), a scientific genius hiding behind the fading mask of a Hollywood actress (taking her cue from the similarly unsung real-life Tinseltown boffin Hedy Lamarr) and, returning from Season One to muddy the waters, the deliriously deranged Dottie (Bridget Regan), proto-Black Widow and all-round bad egg. Compared to these two, the male villains prove a pretty hopeless and easily manipulated bunch.

Tonally, there's a far greater emphasis on comedy this time around, making this – despite the Chandleresque settings – more reminiscent of *The Thin Man* than *The Long Goodbye*. Not all the gags land, but the amusing interplay between these larger-than-life characters sparkles for the most part. Ten episodes rather than eight means that the overall effect, given the single storyline, is perhaps less tightly focused and impactful than the previous season. Still, it's irresistably old fashioned fun, with gorgeous Forties stylings and clothes to die for, put over by a fantastic ensemble led, but not dominated, by the lovely Hayley Atwell. Props to her for taking a minor character and turning her into a feminist geek icon through sheer bloody charm.

What a pity we won't now get to see the formation of SHIELD, discover the truth about Peggy's brother, or find out who shot Jack Thompson...

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

GOOD-LOOKING 1940S ROMP WITH THE LOVELY MS ATWELL **8**

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS: SEASONS 1-7

Created by Alfred Hitchcock, US 1955-1962
Fabulous Films, £65.99 (DVD)

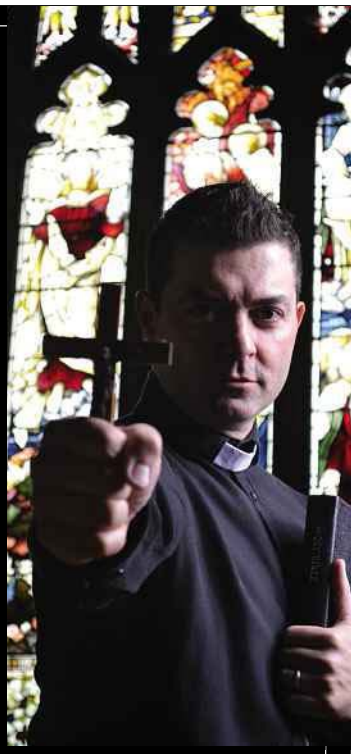
THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK HOUR: SEASONS 1-3

Created by Alfred Hitchcock, US 1962-1965
Fabulous Films, £79.99 (DVD)

Good evening, and welcome to the 1950s and 60s, a time when directorial genius Alfred Hitchcock dominated cinematic thrills. Yet making classics like *Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *The Birds* clearly wasn't enough for the roly-poly showman: he wanted to conquer the small screen too. Fabulous Films have released the results: the complete collections of both *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (seven seasons) and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (three seasons) are locked and loaded, and ready for your TV.

There are some cracking episodes here, and some pretty scary ones too – like 'The Glass Eye' (*Presents*, S3, Ep 1), where William Shatner tells a heart-breaking and nightmare-inducing story of a lonely woman and a ventriloquist. 'The Sign of Satan' (*Hour*, S2, Ep 7) has Christopher Lee being stalked by a Satanic cult in Hollywood, while 'The Creeper' (*Presents*, S1, Ep 38) profiles a housewife who's terrified she's going to be the next victim of a local strangler. It's a show that revels in darkness, especially when polite, well-to-do people do bad, and sometime savage, things. Not all the stories work, of course, and I personally prefer the Gothic focus of shows like *Night Gallery* (also available from Fabulous). Yet both of these shows offer solid seasons packed with thrilling and expertly constructed tales: *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* was ranked by the Writers Guild of America as number 79 of the top 101 Best Written TV Series ever made.

Hitchcock's talking-head intros and outros are an iconic treat in themselves, especially when he's frequently so sarcastic about the ad breaks. "Seeing a murder on television can help work off one's antagonisms," says Hitch. "And if you haven't any antagonisms, the commercials will give you some." Cue a washing powder ad. This kind of constant mickey-taking of a network show's sponsors is not something we see very often; even today, shows mostly avoid biting the hand that feeds them, *The Simpsons* being one of the notable exceptions. But Hitchcock rips the *Mad Men* crowd a new one at every opportunity. Many of the shows end with murderers who get away with it – like Barbara Belle Geddes (Miss Ellie from *Dallas*), who smashes her husband's skull in with a frozen leg of lamb ('Lamb To The Slaughter', *Presents*, S3, Ep28) and then feeds the murder weapon to the cops. Here, Hitch bows to convention, adding unconvincing conclusions that the stories don't need: "She was eventually caught and brought to justice". Such 'crime does not pay' asides feel forced, a reassurance to audiences of the time that the moral compass of the show (and, by implication, the network) were not as skewed as these tales implied.



People like their box sets these days, but put these two bad boys together and you're talking hardcore binge watching: a total of 366 episodes on 59 discs, clocking in at 11,167 minutes. Maybe this could be your daily watch for the rest of the year, or you could always binge them all in one sitting – just under eight days, without pressing stop. And with that thought, I bid you... goodnight.

Fortean Times Verdict

LEYTONSTONE'S FINEST AUTEUR CONQUERS THE SMALL SCREEN **9**

The Neighbour

Dir Marcus Dunstan, US 2016

Arrow Fims, £7.99 (DVD)

What could be worse than living next door to drug dealers? What if you *are* the drug dealers? What if you're planning to give up the criminal life and go straight, but your wife goes missing? Do you check out the creepy neighbour next door? Better be careful – you might discover they're far nastier than you could ever be…

That's the set up of Marcus Dunstan's *The Neighbour*, a creepy slow-burn horror thriller. Dunstan has form in the field, having directed trap-driven *Collector* series of movies, and along with screenwriter Patrick Melton, he contributed to four of the successful *Saw* series. If that's your thing, then this should satisfy. There are echoes of the likes of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Wolf Creek* in *The Neighbour's* rural horror, but there's little here to distinguish the film from a host of similar efforts. There's enough gore to keep the 'grindhouse' audience happy, but if you're looking for more than that, you're likely to be frustrated.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
SCRAPPY, GORE-DRIVEN HORROR FOR *SAW* FANS **5**

Twilight's Last Gleaming

Dir Robert Aldrich, US 1977

Eureka Entertainment, £19.99 (Dual Format)

Based on the pulp novel *Viper Three* by Walter Wager, the film's title is taken from US national anthem ("what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming"). Director Robert Aldrich teams up once again with longtime collaborator Burt Lancaster, who plays an idealistic yet unhinged mad-dog military man, General Lawrence Dell. Escaping from military prison, he takes over a silo near Montana, holding the President to ransom with nine nuclear missiles and demanding he reveal a top-secret document regarding the Vietnam War.

Stylistically speaking, Aldrich keeps things simple and straightforward, apart from a tendency to make (probably too much) use of a split-screen to show different strands of the storyline simultaneously. The clash of political ideologies on show suggests the inherent dishonesty of the government and the military, and yet patriot Dell is willing to murder innocents in a nuclear Armageddon. It's a pretty improbable narrative, but a bold film with a good deal more on its agenda than being just another bog-standard liberal conspiracy thriller. The run-time is a little long and perhaps the material would have been better suited to a television drama, but the performances are certainly solid.

Nia Jones

Fortean Times Verdict
SLIGHTLY EXHAUSTING 1970S CONSPIRACY FLICK **7**

Cocoon

Dir Ron Howard, US 1985

Eureka Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu ray)

First released in 1985, *Cocoon* isn't the only Sci-Fi film based on the pursuit of the "Fountain of Eternal Youth" and its implications, but getting old remains a theme not often explored in youth-obsessed Tinseltown. In Ron Howard's fondly remembered film, the Antareans, a group of aliens disguised as humans, arrive in Florida on a rescue mission. Meanwhile, residents from the retirement community next door come across the visitors' alien pods in a nearby swimming pool – and they soon discover that contact with these aliens provokes a wholesale rejuvenation of body and soul.

The narrative is highly calculated and extremely sentimental, its strong emotional undertones paired with some super tear-jerking moments. The plot is a bit uneven in development, and some might find it dated and even derivative in retrospect, while the comedic highlights are both predictable and completely charming. Cocoon still makes several salient points about society's attitude towards elders in their 'twilight years', Howard's direction is clever and the musical score by James Horner is exceptional. Seen in its context as a light-hearted feel-good movie with a stellar cast of Hollywood veterans (Don Ameche, Hume Cronyn) it more than does its job.

Nia Jones

Fortean Times Verdict
EXTRATERRESTRIAL EIGHTIES NOSTALGIA **8**

SHORTS

HOLIDAYS

Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment, £9.99 (DVD)

John Carpenter probably had no clue that when he changed the title of his movie from 'The Babysitter Murders' to *Halloween* he'd be starting a trend. Forty years later and horror films are *still* tying themselves to the calendar, as *Holidays*, a patchy anthology which offers the usual Christmas and Hallowe'en segments, demonstrates. Yet it's the other dates that provide most fun here. Standouts are 'St Patrick's Day' – a wacky folk story about a school teacher's extremely strange pregnancy – and 'Easter', with its ominous twist on the Easter Bunny. 'Father's Day', an audio cassette-based tale, pretty much throbs with dread too. **PL** 6/10

INSTRUMENTS OF EVIL

Available from Eyecatcher Video (www.eyecat.com), $20 (DVD)

The Viking God Loki crosses time and space to hunt down four musical demons that have possessed some 1980s hip hop singles and deadly, serated violins. This ultra-low-budget horror comedy is utterly ridiculous, but it's something else too: genuinely fun. Perhaps it's the enthusiasm, or the sheer absurdity of it all. Or maybe it's just hard not to feel affection for a movie with zombies who breakdance so hard their limbs come flying off. I LOL'd. **PL** 7/10

GAMES

BARROW HILL: THE DARK PATH

Iceberg Interactive, £14.99 (PC DVD)

This is an interesting game, but somewhat of a mixed bag. It's a sequel of sorts to *Barrow Hill: Curse of the Ancient Circle*, which came out about a decade ago, and in many ways it's as if that intervening decade in gaming hasn't happened. You see, *The Dark Path* is a classic, old fashioned, point-and-click horror adventure, with all the pros and cons that the genre has always had. And when I say 'old fashioned', that's exactly what I mean. When you think of a modern day point-and-click, it would be something like *Life is Strange*, with its 3D environments, superb voice acting and complex storyline. *The Dark Path*, on the other hand, is deliberately,even stubbornly, retro, with static images as backgrounds, across which the player has to slowly move the cursor, pixel by pixel, to find out where to click. Despite this throwback feel, the game has some nods to modernity, with clues to puzzles to be found in video clips on mobile phones and tablets. The storyline – three teenagers go missing in a forest while performing a druidic ritual – is interesting enough, and there are a few genuine scares, with a creepy ghost which appears and disappears every now and then. The shadow of *Blair Witch* looms large over the whole thing, which can hardly be described as original. It's an undeniably interesting and even entertaining enough game, but you should probably add or remove a point depending on your love for point-and-click adventures. **Richmond Clements** 6/10

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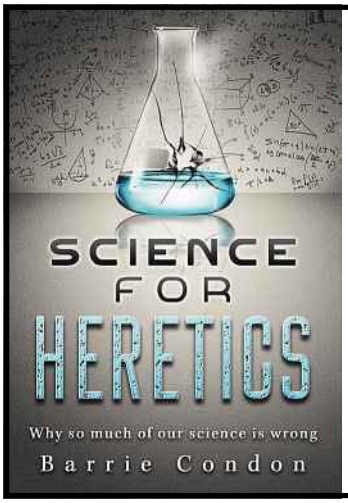

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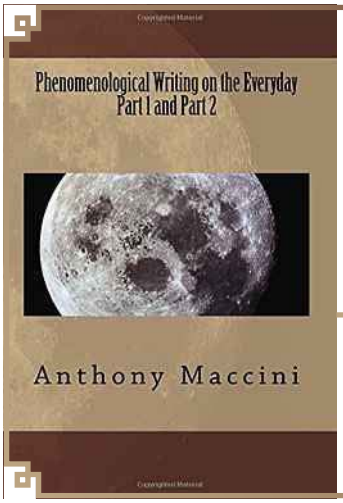

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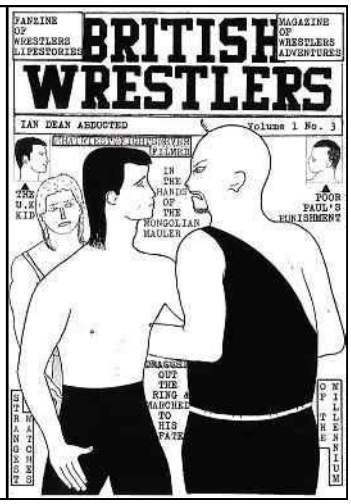

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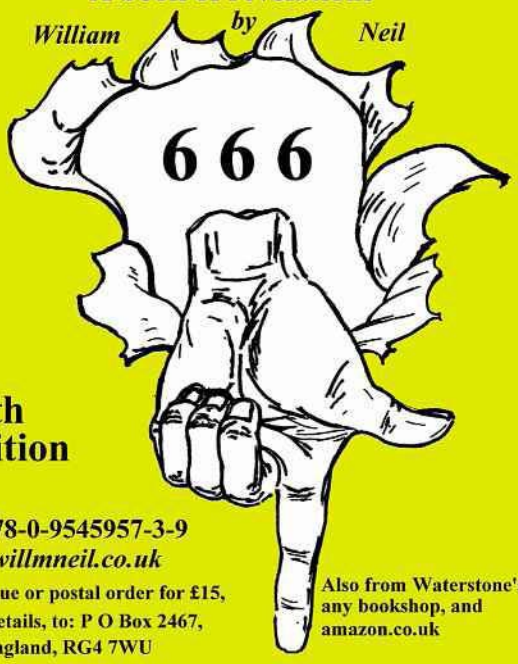

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Dear FT...

letters

Baia oracle

I read with interest the article by Mike Dash on the Oracle at Baia, 'A Visit To The Underworld' [**FT346:32-37**]. Robert Temple's *Netherworld* (2001) examines the site in detail and relates its modern history. What I found most puzzling is how the tunnels are so straight and how they knew there was an underground river – but maybe the tunnels were dug with the intention of providing an artificial river before they found the real one. Since the area is volcanic, the possibility that there was an underground hot water river was a possibility that the Romans, who were great engineers, might have thought possible. The thing that I find most intriguing is why it was filled in and by whom; not by the Romans, who believed in oracles, but perhaps by the mediæval Church, though the Church didn't bother to do that with any other sites and converting it to a Dante-like vision of Hell would, I think, be more likely. Maybe one day a dusty archive will reveal a forgotten diary with the details. I also have a copy of *Oracle of the Dead* by John Maddox Roberts (XII of the SPQR series), a fictional account of a murder mystery set in the last years of the Roman Republic and obviously based on the Baia site.

Margaret Pitcher
Waramanga, Australian Capital Territory

In 'A Visit To The Underworld' Mike Dash mentions the Cumæan Sibyl – an ancient prophetess who was offered one wish by the Sun god Apollo in exchange for her virginity. I have described how the scientists/physicists at CERN are preparing to open wormholes connecting dimensions in the Universe despite pleas from Christian evangelicals who warn that this will release demonic entities into our world since Satan commands the Second Heaven [**FT340:68**]. The ninth chapter of the Book of Revelation foretells the Abyss being opened as demons rise from it like 'smoke pouring from a great furnace'; rising with them is their leader, the king of the Underworld – Apollyon.

The Cumæan Sibyl prophesied the return of the god Apollo, the destruction of Rome and connected the End Times Islamic Mahdi with a 'Last Roman Emperor' believed to be pope #112 Francis (see *The Final Roman Emperor* by Thomas Horn and Cris Putnam, Defender Publishing, 2016.) The Cumæan Sibyl's prophecies are encoded on the Great Seal of the United States as well as in Catholic art including her appearance upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Regarding the destruction of Rome, this will be an End Times occurrence foretold in the Prophecies of St Malachy: "In the final persecution of the Holy Roman Church there will reign Peter the Roman, who will feed his flock among many tribulations; after which the seven-hilled city will be destroyed, and the dreadful judge will judge his people." (See *The Prophecies of St Malachy & St Columbkille* by Peter Bander, Colin Smythe Ltd, 1969, 2005).

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Editor's note: Prevailing opinion is that *The Prophecies of St Malachy*, first published in 1590, were not written by the Irish St Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh (1095-1148), but forged on behalf of Cardinal Girolamo Simoncelli (1522-1605) to support his bid for the papacy. This of course does not detract from the apparent accuracy of some of the post-1590 prophecies.

Wedding crasher

This is a photo of my daughter and me about three years ago in a barn at a wedding venue in Hereford. There were no children at the wedding and there was no one behind us when the photo was taken as a selfie. The image has been sent to my iPad and is not as clear as the original.

Kirsty Johnson
Brighouse, West Yorkshire

Perspective on Ukraine

Regarding SD Tucker's piece on "War And Peace (Simultaneously)" [**FT347:50-53**], I don't read *Fortean Times* to hear the same old Putin-bashing propaganda that the mainstream media indulges in; I'd have thought FT was above such outright polemic. Tucker asserts that Viktor Yanukovich was ousted in "a revolutionary uprising", but he was clearly ousted by a US-led putsch. Even George Friedman, the Founder and CEO of Stratfor, the 'Shadow CIA', says of the overthrow of Ukraine's President Yanukovich, "It really was the most blatant coup in history". What did the US and the neocon-controlled, US-funded National Endowment for Democracy spend around $6 billion on? Cookies? And Tucker quotes the widespread untruth that Russia annexed Crimea. Crimea saw Washington's meddling in Ukraine's affairs and democratically voted to ally themselves with Russia, not Ukraine. Nor was there any mention of the neo-Nazi elements who were an integral part of the so-called uprising.

And finally, the supposed surreal post-modern ideology of Putin's Russia has its US equivalent. It was neocon poster boy Karl Rove who said of America: "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out".

Ian Callaghan
By email

SD Tucker replies: Oh dear, Mr Callaghan won't have liked the subsequent entries in the series, then. Whilst, like many people on the conservative right, I actually have some amount of sympathy for the likes of Putin and Aleksandr Dugin myself as regards certain limited issues; if you read the latter's *Fourth Political Theory*, for example, amidst all the gnostic weirdness, impenetrable claims about angels and strange ideas culled from Nazi philosophers, you will find much legitimate and sensible criticism of certain aspects of 'liberal' Western society and neocon-style US-led 'hegemony' with which I would not wholly disagree. I'd stand by my basic theory, expressed across the four articles, that it is blatantly obvious that Russian 'democracy' is a gigantic sham, designed in some way to be a parody of the Western model, with its comically cartoonish candidates like Vladimir Zhirinovsky.

For example, I can't help but notice that the referenda on Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine joining up with Russia were held after Putin had in effect annexed these areas anyway, thus making the results basically moot. Whilst I happily accept that many people in Crimea and eastern Ukraine probably would indeed prefer to be part of Russia rather than Ukraine (as historically they often have been), if anyone thinks that voters would have been allowed to decide otherwise once the votes had actually been counted, I would

letters

suggest they are being somewhat naïve. Whilst geography, history and ethnicity perhaps suggest that Crimea should never have been separated from Russia in the first place, the fact nonetheless remains that Crimea was invaded and annexed.

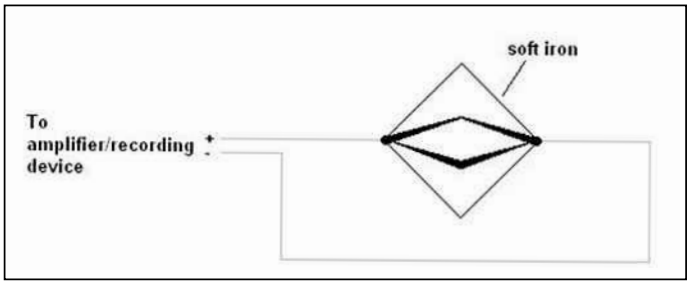
One final point, though; these 'Strange Statesmen' articles are supposed to be essentially comic explorations of weird things, ideas and events centring around politicians worldwide; they're not meant to have any genuinely polemical, let alone propagandistic, purpose, as Mr Callaghan suggests. In the current case, I didn't write the pieces specifically thinking 'Now I can bash the evil Mr Putin!' but so I could write about amusingly silly things like Pokémon being labelled as Western agents, cosmic calculators protecting people from the forces of gayness, or Darth Vader being accused of electoral fraud. I'm quite happy to repeat negative stories about politicians I like, as well, if it makes for an interesting article. For example, like the grovelling capitalist lickspittle I am, I actually greatly admire Ronald Reagan, but was quite happy to pen a mocking article about him being anally-raped following an imaginary car-crash some months back; given Mr Callaghan's apparent anti-US stance, perhaps he wasn't bothered by that. So, in short, if you find a Left-wing pro-Russian nutter being detailed in one instalment, rest-assured there'll be a Right-wing, pro-American loon described in a future one. Please don't read these articles thinking I'm telling you which side to back or vote for on any given issue… surely no one reads FT looking to find serious political guidance?

Ghost detectors

Ghostwatch [**FT347:16**] expressing a healthy scepticism towards the "machine which could detect demons and poltergeists" got me thinking about Electronic Voice Phenomena. The device described in the article as "an electrical gadget generating loud static and white noise through an audio output fed into earphones" strikes me as rather reminiscent of George Meek's 'Spiricom' or Frank Sumption's 'Ghost Box'.

As far as I can tell the 'Spiricom' is essentially a device which creates various audio frequency tones, converts them into electronic signals, transmits these signals via radio (for some reason), picks up the same signals via a nearby antenna, converts them back into audio tones, then records them via a microphone. The 'Ghost Box' appears just to be an AM radio that sweeps through a range of frequencies while recording the resultant noise. In summary, the 'Spiricom' creates noise and then transduces it repeatedly before recording the outcome, while the 'Ghostbox' just records the noise it generates directly. Both devices are basically 'pareidolia machines' – by their very nature they can't produce anything conclusive (and I suspect they aren't intended to).

Nonetheless, the concept intrigues me. I believe EVP enthusiasts frequently just set up recording devices with microphones in supposedly haunted buildings and then play back whatever the devices pick up. A microphone comprises a wire coil in close proximity to a permanent magnet. The vibration caused by sound carrying through the air causes the coil to move with respect to the magnet, inducing a current in the wire. Since the point of capturing EVP is that one hears sounds on the playback that weren't apparent at the time of recording, one can reasonably infer that any paranormally derived signal that appears on the playback was generated directly by electromagnetic influence on the recording device, rather than by vibrating the air at an audible frequency. This seems plausible given the numerous instances of electromagnetic phenomena reportedly associated with hauntings.



ABOVE: An EVP apparatus designed to help detect electromagnetic fluctuations.

If one is attempting to communicate with an entity that communicates by manipulating electric or magnetic fields, a microphone is not optimised for this purpose. For EVP experiments I therefore propose to substitute the conventional microphone for an apparatus that is better able to facilitate detection of electromagnetic fluctuations. I propose a device that reacts to perturbation in any of the three dimensions we are aware of: an arrangement of straight wires made of something suitably magnetically susceptible such as soft (annealed) iron (*see figure above*). A magnetic field could also be applied perpendicular to the wires to emulate the environment found within a conventional microphone, though it is not obvious whether this would make it easier or harder for an external agency to induce a detectable effect.

As for generating tones or white noise: I see no reason to do so. The presence of a random signal imposed on the recording would make no difference to the ease with which any additional signal could be imposed via my antenna – indeed the noise would just obfuscate anything that was there. If I were an intelligent entity attempting to communicate with someone who may or may not know what they're looking for, I would not attempt any form of speech; it would be much more sensible to draw attention to myself via some simple, structured transmission, such as Morse code or simply tapping out prime numbers.

Finally, there is the matter of signal processing. Listening to white noise and attempting to discern words from it is so inconclusive as to be a pointless exercise. There are a number of freely available signal-processing tools on the web that can be used to remove white noise from audio files and analyse what's left without the subjectivity of a credulous human listener.

• 'Phenomenomix' [**FT343:79**] made me chuckle, but the pedant in me feels compelled to point out that my surname doesn't begin with an 'L'; and fundamental particles do not become waves when one attempts to observe them – wave particle duality applies to all things all the time. Heisenberg does, however, impose certain limits on the precision with which observations can be made. The ever-mischievous David EH Jones (writing as 'Daedalus' in *Nature*, June 1988), speculates that the uncertainty principle may provide the essential cover for divine (and presumably other paranormal) interventions that are not detected by established scientific methodology.

Ian I'Anson
Sompting, West Sussex

Baby-eating

Jan Bondeson's account from the *Illustrated Police News* [**FT346:74**] of the pig which stole and ate a baby in 1870, and his statement that "it was noted that the practice of leaving young children unattended was only too prevalent", reminds me that in certain parts of the country this might have been a deliberate practice!

My husband comes from the Lye, near Stourbridge (in the Black Country), where, in the mid-19th century: "The Lye Waste boasted that Coroners' inquests on infanticide were unknown… There is truth in this despite the notorious immorality of the area, but the truth is simple – most Lye Wasters kept pigs and if there chanced to be a superfluous baby the family pig was kept on short commons for a day or so then the child (somehow) chanced to fall into the sty and in half an hour no coroner could have found any remains to 'sit upon'".

Thus wrote Walter B Woodgate in *Reminiscences of an Old Sportsman* (1909), as quoted in an

excellent article on the Lye in *The Blackcountryman* 49/4 (Autumn 2016) by Eric Pritchard. Immediately after this quote is one from the Revd Sabine Baring Gould, whose long-forgotten *Nebo the Nailer* (1902) is set in that same location: "... on the Waste Moor from time immemorial [there were] two or three families of hereditary cripples. It was generally supposed that they were without backbones, but this, of course, was not the case. Their backbones were contorted and... they ran about for the most part on their hands and knees and displayed extraordinary powers of rapid locomotion in this manner".

There is much more of this sort of thing in *The Blackcountryman* article – the Lye was a strange place indeed back then. I'm happy to report that, although when he was a child my husband's next door neighbours still kept a pig, the custom of feeding children to them seems to have died out by then. Nor does my husband get around on all fours.

Rosemary Pardoe
Hoole, Chester

An essential read

For me a highlight of each *Fortean Times* is the book review section. The reviews are by and large thoughtful and thought-provoking and their range impressive. I was therefore disappointed with the review of Mike Jay's *This Way Madness Lies* [**FT348:57**]. Though elegantly written, it was little more than a partial synopsis and an articulation of some of the book's apparent conclusions, when so much could have been said about the perspective the author takes and the wider context of the issues he raises. Although the book is lacking in some areas – particularly regarding the politics of the Victorian asylums and their continuing legacy – and highly selective in some of its narrative threads, it is nonetheless a phenomenal piece of work that in the wider context of the crisis of mental health services demands to be read by all concerned with the issues of madness and stigmatisation and what these mean for our wider social wellbeing.

The book raises fundamental issues. The mental health crisis is something for which we pay a dreadful price in terms of broken lives and unfulfilled potential. There is ample evidence the situation is worsening, recent research into the increasing rates of self-harm amongst teenage girls being the latest in a catalogue of alarming statistics. Although I would take issue with some aspects of Mike Jay's book – for example it is a debatable whether our approach to irrationality is any more rational than that of our predecessors – it is an essential read, an attempt to humanise a set of issues at the core of a dreadful malaise that must be addressed.

Tony Creedon
By email

Illegal incense

So far as I can see, every Catholic church in the land has been breaking the law since 29 May 2016 because of the new Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. In 2015 I wrote a report in the *Catholic Herald*: www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/09/21/legal-highs-bill-that-could-lead-to-banning-of-incense-criticised-by-christian-bodies/. I got a wonderful quotation from the great Professor David Nutt, the former Government "drugs tsar", who said the Bill is "so poorly thought through that it is embarrassing to think educated politicians would support it. By targeting people's mental and moral wellbeing, this Bill is the worst since the Act of Supremacy in 1559 banned the practice of the Catholic faith."

A government minister wrote to churches last year: "The use of incense in religious services will not be covered by the bill" (www.theguardian.com/society/2015/oct/02/church-incense-not-included-psychoactive-substances-bill-home-office). But if you examine the Act, it's not specifically exempted: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/2/schedule/1/enacted and www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/2/schedule/2/enacted – so by definition it's illegal. A well-meaning letter from a minister doesn't constitute law.

And one clause in the Act says: "(3) For the purposes of this Act a person consumes a substance if the person causes or allows the substance, or fumes given off by the substance, to enter the person's body in any way" (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/2/section/2/enacted).

David V Barrett
London

ABC lore

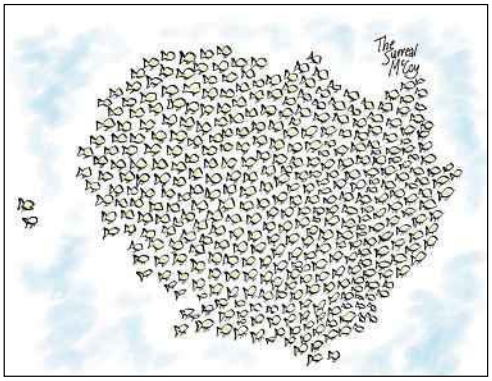
Aficionados of alien/anomalous big cat lore [**FT344:20-25**] may be interested in a distinctly fortean discussion of the topic in a mainstream source: *Feral*, a 2013 book by prominent UK environmentalist and activist George Monbiot. The book is a lyrical scientific and cultural discussion of the environmental principle of 'rewilding', the remaking of degraded landscapes and ecosystems into contemporary 'wild' spaces. In amidst discussions of many interesting topics (such as the fact that the branch design of many British tree species may have evolved as a response to the depredations of prehistoric European elephants), Monbiot has a chapter entitled 'The Never-Spotted Leopard', dealing with ABC sightings in the UK. Beginning by relating his meeting with a seemingly impeccable ABC witness (a county council officer and ex-policeman), Monbiot expresses an epistemological position similar to Jerome Clark's notion of experience anomalies [**FT243:42-47**]: he believes that most witnesses are truthful in relating their big cat sightings and experiences, but also believes that the cats themselves are non-existent, due to the lack of physical evidence for them.

After a potted history of the ABC phenomenon (with Merrily Harpur's *Mystery Big Cats* serving as a major reference point), Monbiot comes to a conclusion based upon the psychosocial premise that "certain paranormal phenomena afflict every society, and these phenomena appear to reflect our desires; desires of which we may not be fully conscious". He begins by describing a couple of historical examples of such a process at work: firstly, that the rise of spiritualism in 19th century Britain was linked to the high mortality rates of life in early industrial societies; secondly, that the post-WWII culture of UFO sightings was related to the "transformative potential" of the rapid technological advances in this era (and the subsequent expansion of the human imagination into outer space due to the 'shrinking' of the Earth, thanks to advances in scientific knowledge).

Building on these precursors, Monbiot posits that ABC sightings are manifestations of a cultural desire for a more primal engagement with nature in our current era of 'over-civilisation': "As our lives have become tamer and more predictable, as the abundance and diversity of nature have declined, as our physical challenges have diminished to the point at which the greatest trial of strength and ingenuity we face is opening a badly designed packet of nuts, could these imaginary creatures have brought us something we miss?". He surmises that the cats "hint at an unexpressed wish for lives wilder and fiercer than those we now lead", this wish taking the form of large felines as such beasts, being one of the main predators of early hominids, are deeply rooted in the collective genetic memory of our species as symbols of nature 'red in tooth and claw'.

While it is a relatively brief chapter, I was struck by Monbiot's open-minded approach towards the paranormal and non-materialistic solution to the mystery (ABCs as 'experiential manifestations of the social imaginary' not being a typical topic in books about environmentalism!)

Dean Ballinger
Hamilton, New Zealand



CAROL ISAACS

"Are we there yet?"

letters

SIMULACRA CORNER: WOODEN PERSONALITIES

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Meeting Nicola

I have kept an irregular journal and have jotted down some of the more notable incidents and at quiet times it pleases me to flick through the now yellowing pages and reminisce. One experience bothers me so much that not one day goes past without my thinking about it. The following is an almost verbatim copy of my journal entry, itself a copy of the original notes I jotted down immediately after the event but which have since been lost:

"At approximately 8:30am [on 21 June 1983] I left —Dudley Road to walk along the River Thames to Walton Bridge and the 'Cowey Sale'. I was hoping to see my friend Joe——, who was selling ice cream for the summer. When I arrived at approximately 9am his van was nowhere to be seen. I decided to wait and while I did so I walked along the bank of the river, away from the bridge and up to where there was a sloping concrete launch for boats. I then turned and looked for my friend's van which I expected/hoped to be parked in the car park and the usual spot. He had still to arrive. The day was cloudy and brisk and I decided that the weather had put him off coming down to his pitch. I started to wander back along the bank and home. Up to this point, apart from the odd car which had sped past, I had seen no other person along what is usually a busy stretch of the river. The only people I could see were a couple of fishermen who had set up right next to the bridge.

"After walking about 50 yards from the concrete launch, I heard a loud 'splash' coming from behind me on the left and the river. Thinking it might be a large fish, I turned and went to investigate. A fisherman myself (and a lifelong visitor along these banks), I knew the sound was coming from a small, semi-circular area of the bank that had been worn away and allowed fishermen to wade out into the water quietly without having to step down into the river from the bank. To my shock – I had only passed the spot moments before – standing on the shingle was a girl, probably a couple of years younger than me (18/19), bending down and looking out at a dog that was swimming in the water. I turned away and started

"The hairs all over my body stood on end as if I'd touched a live wire..."

to walk back home again. After just a few strides I decided to go back and have a chat... from what I had seen she seemed quite attractive! I opened with the line:

'Hi, are you an art student on leave too?'

'No,' she said. 'I'm just walking my Nan's dog.'

"The girl had jet-black hair, very white, faultless skin and plump, full red lips. Her eyes were stunning and were a true emerald green, sparkling in the murky light and piercing. Of the dog that was in the water I could only see its head. It was large, menacing and black. We continued chatting by the bank and she revealed that her name was Nicola and that she lived in Streatham. I then suggested that if she had nothing on we should go for a walk. She agreed and I thought I was 'in'.

"We crossed over the road and headed to Broadwater Lake, a great fishing spot for tench and a lake that was supposed to have been created by Capability Brown. The chat was light and jovial and we brushed shoulders as we walked. 'Nicola' seemed to be very relaxed. It was as we approached the end of the rough, rutted lane which led to the lake that I suddenly became very uneasy in her company. She was gorgeous, I thought, and must have been chatted-up so many times before; surely she must have been aware of the dangers of going off with strangers... and yet here she was, alone, with a stranger (me) in a dark (even though it was day), secluded spot. The hairs all over my body stood on end as if I'd touched a live wire and I stopped. I then – and I really don't know why – asked the first thing that came into my head: 'Do you know why the 23rd is called mid-summer although today is the Solstice?'

"It was a pathetic question. It had come from nowhere and just sounded stupid, but the affect it had on 'Nicola' was bizarre. She stopped in her tracks and her face became contorted and angry. Her eyes narrowed to slits and her nostrils flared. 'Why are you asking me this?' she demanded. 'Why do you think I would know that? Do you think I know?'

"I was shocked, stunned and very disturbed. I really did think I was with an escaped mental patient. I was very scared even though I was 12 stone and heavily muscled and she was slim and of average height. There was an awkward silence that seemed to last ages as we stepped two or three paces forward. Suddenly she turned round and said: 'Oh, hi, you're here?'

"I turned and looked over my left shoulder and stumbled as I looked at something which wasn't possible. Immediately behind us, no more than a yard, was a giant of a man standing astride a hefty black and chrome motorbike. He was dressed in all black leathers and wore a black helmet with a darkened visor. I couldn't see his face but could just make out the white of his eyes. I was terrified. I hadn't heard the bike. Even if he had pushed it along the 150 yards of the pot-holed dirt track we were on I would have heard something. I thought it might be her boyfriend or an over-protective brother. 'Frank,' said Nicola. 'Do you just want to go on, I won't be a minute.'

"Relieved, I gladly walked to the end of the lane, some 20 yards, where it turned to the right and behind a big oak. I glanced back only once and then waited behind the tree for a minute. Curious to get another look at the bike and biker, I popped my head around the corner. There was no one there.

"Refusing to accept anything supernatural, I strained my eyes and ears and sprinted (I am an 11 second 100 metre runner) to the end of the lane and the 100 yard climb up a hill where the lane joins the main road. Nothing and nobody was to be seen... and then I realised: Where was the dog? It hadn't followed us on our romantic walk. We had left it in the water. I ran to the spot on the bank. Nothing."

The account goes on to say how I ran back home and then to my cousin's house, and how I described everything that had happened. It also states how for many years afterwards – at the same time and place – I visited the site... with nothing unusual occurring.

The incident was in all probability insignificant; no one was harmed and there was no real consequence, *but it was real*. I actually touched Nicola (albeit with my shoulder). I felt that she was no phantasm, no product of an overactive imagination, *but I don't know what she was*... and it frustrates me so. I came so close, so close to finding out about something which we are, it appears, not allowed to know; fifth-dimensional beings, aliens, fairy folk? I consider the facts and memories every day and I will go to my grave without ever knowing the answer... but the fact that I came so close bothers me more than you can know.

Hopefully this letter will help expunge my feeling of having guessed the six numbers and then lost the ticket.

Francesco Scannella
Walton on Thames, Surrey

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News.*

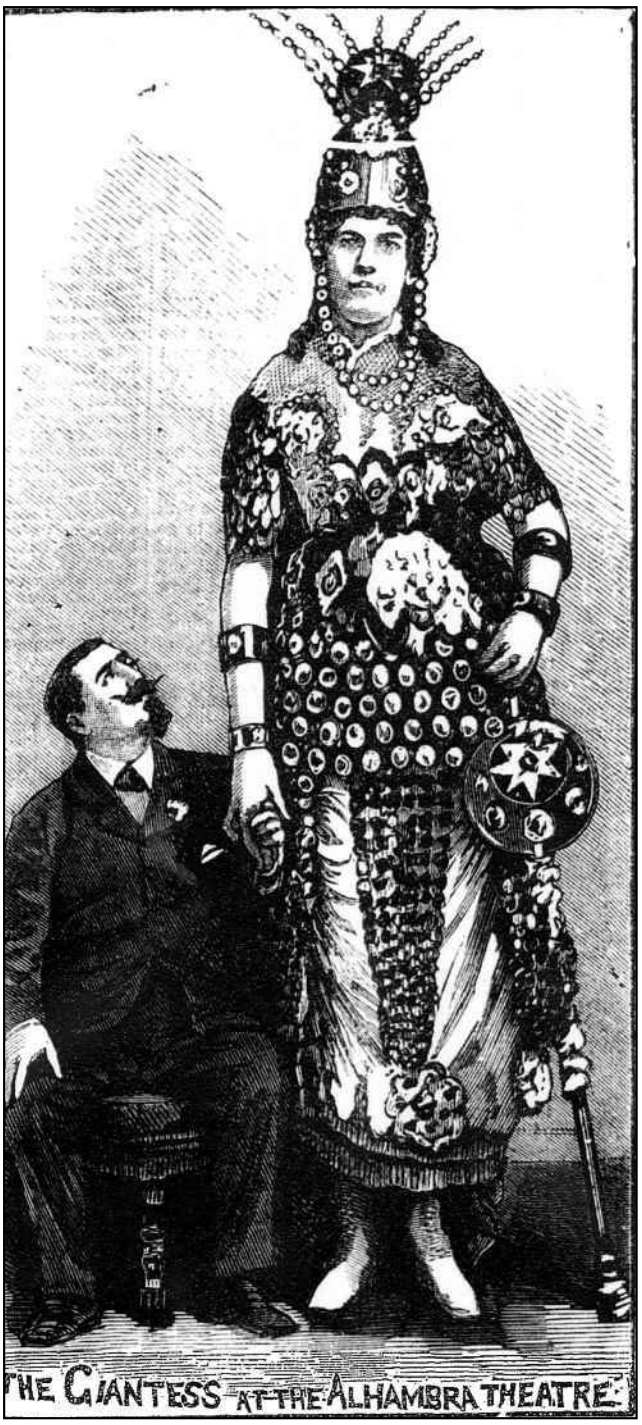
54. MARIAN, THE GIANT AMAZON QUEEN

Marian Wedde was born on 31 January 1866 in the village of Benkendorf in Thüringen, Germany. Her parents were ordinary German country people, the father working as a fireman at a large distillery for spirits. She had nine brothers and sisters, all of normal stature, but from an early age, Marian grew to be extremely tall. A special stool had to be manufactured for her use at school. To prevent her head bumping into the low ceilings of the farmhouse, she had to walk with a pronounced stoop. Once, she fell down heavily and hurt her ankle, an injury leading to permanent lameness. In 1882, she was 'discovered' by the German impresario Herr Kopf, and exhibited for money in Berlin, Hamburg and other cities. In July 1882, she was taken to London, where the operetta *Babil and Bijou* at the Alhambra Theatre, Leicester Square, had a part of an Amazon Queen purposely written for a gigantic actress.

Marian spoke no English, but this didn't matter, since her role in the play was a silent one. Dressed in an azure tunic and a silver cuirass, she walked heavily about on stage, to audible admiration from the audience. A man of over six feet in height could easily walk erect under her outstretched arm. Despite her size, she was not unattractive: the theatrical critic George Augustus Sala even wrote that "Notwithstanding her colossal height and build, she is very well proportioned, and she is decidedly handsome, possessing as she does the true pre-Raphaelite maxillary angle." Her English impresario Mr William Holland, of the Alhambra Theatre, pointed out to the journalists that since Marian was only 16 years old, she was still growing.

Marian soon became one of the leading human curiosities of London. She was depicted in the *Illustrated Police News*, along with her manager William Holland, and her portrait appeared on all the theatre posters for *Babil and Bijou*. One of the few people who disapproved of her was the theatrical critic Clement Scott, who wrote: "Suppose it had been suggested to me that good music would be put on one side, good singers cold-shouldered, beautiful ballets made a second consideration, our lovely English women rendered of no account, singing, acting, decoration, spectacle, art, all made subordinate to one abnormal monster – well, I should have laughed the Barnum to scorn who had such faith in monstrosities and the eccentricity of the English public. But, as it turns out, I should have been extremely wrong. Mr William Holland, of the Alhambra Theatre, has proved that at any rate. He has discovered in Germany a giantess who, massive, awkward, and unwieldy as she is, has managed to draw more people to the Alhambra Theatre than have ever before been known to assemble there at this time of year... No one talks of anything else but Mr Holland's giantess, with her amiable inexpressive face, her clumsy gait, and her speechless look of dismay. It does not amuse me to hear that she is still growing; I only pity the fate of the poor girl so cruelly ill-used by Nature."

Marian carried on acting the part of the Amazon Queen in *Babil and Bijou* throughout July and August 1882. In late August,



LEFT: Marian the Giantess at the Alhambra Theatre, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 29 July 1882.

STRATED NEWS
EKLY RECORD

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LEFT: Following Marian's appearance at the Alhambra, the theatre burned down in December 1882; it was rebuilt and re-opened in 1884. **BELOW:** A handbill advertising Marian's appearance and pointing out that she "is still growing".

she held two receptions at the Crystal Palace, in front of an admiring crowd. The popular operetta carried on playing throughout the remainder of 1882, with the giantess taking part in every performance. On 3 December, she attended a party at Marlborough House, at the invitation of the Prince and Princess of Wales. The jocular Prince gave the young giantess a glass of champagne, and although she was normally a strict teetotaller, she emptied it by Royal command. On 16 December, the *Morning Post* carried the following advertisement "Wanted, a respectable young man to accompany Marian, the Giant Amazon Queen, on her tour through the provinces; must make himself agreeable; liveries found. Apply to Mr W Holland at the Alhambra."

MARIAN, the Giant Amazon Queen, will make her first appearance in England at the ROYAL ALHAMBRA THEATRE on Saturday, 8th July, in the magnificent Silver Armour Scene in the enormously successful Fairy Extravaganza, "BABIL & BIJOU." This young lady was born on the 31st January, 1866, at Benkenderf, a village near the Thuringia Mountains, Germany, and has attained the remarkable HEIGHT OF 8 FEET 2 INCHES, AND IS STILL GROWING.

Marian's provincial tour began at the Trade's Hall in Glasgow on 1 January 1883. She wished the audience a Happy New Year in a strong German accent. A *Glasgow Herald* journalist found her handsome and agreeable, although her hands and feet were of an enormous size. Mr Holland introduced her on stage, describing how she had been 'discovered' in Germany, and complimenting her on her healthy appetite. Marian remained in Glasgow for nearly a month, before travelling on to Dundee and Aberdeen. In February, she was exhibited at the Newcastle Town Hall; in March, at the Cutlers' Hall in Sheffield. A journalist from the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* thought her good-looking and well proportioned, and most pleasant in conversation, during her six-month stay in London, her stature had increased by four inches. In May, Marian was at Reynolds's Waxworks in Liverpool, where she was joined by Herr Brostad, a giant who had just returned from Barnum's circus in America, and by the midgets 'Colonel Ulpta' and 'Major Tiny Tim'. Colonel Ulpta, who cracked jokes like a champion, and sang various comical songs, introduced Marian and her fellow performers to the gawping Liverpudlians; he of course pointed out that she was still growing.

After leaving Liverpool in late May 1883, nothing was heard of Marian in the English papers for several months; there were rumours that she had been taken back to Germany to be exhibited for money, or that her health was failing. Unfortunately, the latter rumour turned out to be true: Marian died in Berlin on 22 January 1884, just before her 18th birthday. The catchphrase 'she is still growing' was repeated even in her newspaper obituary, which added that her death had been somewhat unexpected and that she had been under engagement to proceed to America.

Poor Marian was finally free from the people who had exploited her; she would be spared the heartless stares from the American sideshow 'rubes'; she had reached her final height in life, and would be growing no more.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

NICOLAS FLAMEL

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON

NICOLAS FLAMEL WAS BORN ABOUT 1330 AD, AND BECAME A WEALTHY, SUCCESSFUL PARISIAN SCRIBE...

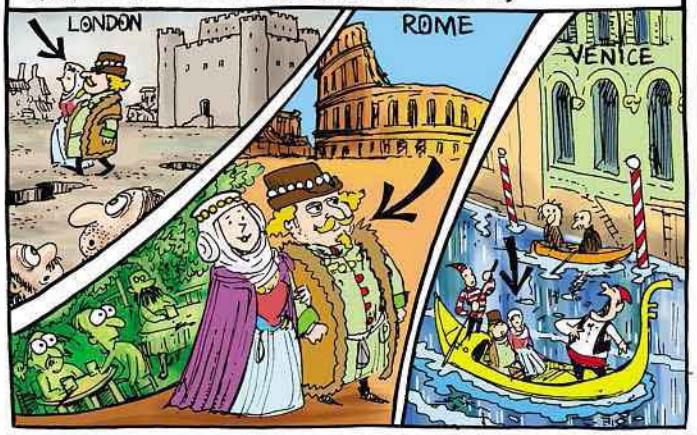
HE GREW EVEN MORE WEALTHY WHEN HE WED PERENELLE, A RICH HEIRESS...

BUT THEY USED THEIR WEALTH WISELY! THEY GAVE MONEY TO THE POOR, AND TO THE CHURCH, AND THEY COMMISSIONED SCULPTORS AND OTHER ARTISTS...

HE DIED ON MARCH 22nd 1418...

OR DID HE???

PEOPLE BEGAN TO REPORT SEEING FLAMEL ALIVE AND WELL ALL OVER EUROPE!



HOW TO EXPLAIN THIS? SIMPLE: FLAMEL WAS A POWERFUL ALCHEMIST, AND HAD FOUND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE! HE COULD TURN BASE MATTER INTO GOLD!!

...AND HE HAD ACHIEVED IMMORTAL YOUTH!!

HE BECAME FAMOUS! EVEN SIR ISAAC NEWTON, IN HIS ALCHEMICAL RAMBLINGS, REFERRED TO "THE DRAGONS OF FLAMEL"!

IN THE 19TH CENTURY, VICTOR HUGO MENTIONED HIM IN "THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE-DAME"..

...AND THE COMPOSER ERIK SATIE WAS FASCINATED BY HIM!

IN THE 21ST CENTURY, HE IS MORE FAMOUS THAN EVER, THANKS TO NAME-CHECKS IN "HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE"!

AND HE IS MENTIONED IN DOZENS OF OTHER MODERN NOVELS, INCLUDING "THE DA VINCI CODE".

OF COURSE ALL THIS FAME CAME TOO LATE FOR FLAMEL... IT CAME AFTER HE DIED... **OR DID HE??**

THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH THESE ETERNAL YOUTH JOHNNIES... YOU NEVER KNOW FOR SURE IF THEY PULLED IT OFF OR NOT! NICOLAS FLAMEL AND PERENELLE COULD STILL BE LURKING ABOUT THE PLACE, BEING IRRITATINGLY YOUTHFUL WHILE THE REST OF US ROT AWAY!

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE MAN OF TOMORROW

THE TIME-TRAVELLER WHO WOULD BE PRESIDENT

AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES

THE TAKING OF DR MOORE AND HOW HE RETURNED

+

LEAST HAUNTED, FUNERAL MUSEUM, PREMATURE GENIUSES, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 351

ON SALE 2 MARCH 2017

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Five police officers in Ukraine were killed by friendly fire during a botched operation to arrest burglars. The overnight shoot-out between two sets of police began when each side believed the other to be criminals. The gunfight began when a burglar alarm went off by chance in the house next door to one being staked out by two undercover policemen. A separate unit then arrived to investigate the alarm, in the small town of Knyazhychi near Kiev, and detained the pair, mistaking them for robbers. But the back-up unit for the two men apparently feared they had been confronted by the thieves and tried to rescue them. Interior ministry adviser Anton Herashchenko said those suspected of being the real burglars – who were nearby – heard the gun battle and fled in two vehicles, but were arrested soon afterwards in Kiev. *BBC News, 4 Dec 2016*.

The Gang of Fort is reminded of a 1970 UPI wire report that Studs Terkel had on his wall: "Police battled a gang of bandits in southern Thailand Saturday. A police spokesman said the battle began when the bandit gang, disguised as policemen, challenged a group of policemen disguised as bandits."

Gillian Sandle, 62, died when her scarf became caught in the wheel of a beach buggy in Havant, Hampshire. Passersby attempted to give her CPH before paramedics took her to hospital, where she was pronounced dead. This reminded us of the tragic demise of the dancer Isadora Duncan in Nice in 1927, memorably portrayed in Ken Russell's 1966 TV film about her. *D.Telegraph, 21 Dec 2016.*

An amorous young couple died from carbon monoxide poisoning while having sex in a car after turning on the ignition to keep warm. It is believed the couple, Artem S and Anna D, from Ufa in south-central Russia's Republic of Bashkortostan, went into a lockup garage being used to renovate the car. They had been having dinner in Artem's home and told his family they were going for a walk. When they didn't return, worried family launched a search and found their naked bodies in each other's arms inside the car. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 12 Nov 2016*.

Darrell Ward, 52, one of the stars of History Channel's hit show *Ice Road Truckers*, died in a plane crash in Montana on 28 August. Suggesting the cosmic trickster's black humour, Ward was on his way to begin filming a documentary about the recovery of plane wreckage. The Cessna 182 was trying to land at Rock Creek Airstrip, a few miles southeast of Missoula, but crashed ahead of the runway. Both Ward, who was later identified as the pilot, and his co-pilot were killed in the crash. *perezhilton.com, 29 Aug 2016.*

A woman died in Caranavi, Bolivia, on New Year's Eve after being mistaken for a car thief and tied to a tree infested with Brazilian fire ants. The 52-year-old was rescued by police but died in hospital from breathing problems caused by severe throat swelling after her windpipe was bitten by the insects. *Sun online, 5 Jan 2017*.

A manager with the BBC World Service threw herself in front of a train on Hallowe'en after she said *Star Wars* characters were contacting her. Anne Barnsdale, 39, from Godalming in Surrey said she was being "mindfucked" by the Jedi. Her doctor, Steve Simons, said she had described having "weird thoughts" but "recognised herself this as fiction and was not delusional or psychotic at the time." She had recently returned to work after having a daughter, but was not suffering post-natal depression, an inquest in Woking heard. *Sun, D.Mirror, 17 Dec 2016.*

Anton Yelchin, 27, an actor best known for playing Pavel Chekov in the most recent series of *Star Trek* films, was killed by his car on 19 June 2016 after it rolled back and pinned him against a brick mailbox pillar beside his steep driveway in Studio City, Los Angeles. The 2.5-ton Jeep Grand Cherokee was found in neutral with the engine running, and police didn't know why he had got out of the vehicle. *Eve. Standard, 20 June; D.Telegraph, 20+21 June 2016*.

At least 62 people died in the Siberian city of Irkutsk after drinking a bath essence called Boyaryshnik (Hawthorn); more than 30 others were seriously ill and only half were expected to survive. The victims were poor people, aged between 35 and 50, and were not drinking together. The hawthorn-scented liquid was consumed as if it were alcohol. Boyaryshnik labels said the content was 93 per cent spirit; but it was found to contain methanol, a toxin found in antifreeze, that causes blindness and death. Analysts say up to 12 million Russians drink cheap surrogate alcohol, including perfume, aftershave, antifreeze and window cleaner. Twelve people have been arrested in an investigation that has seen 1,500 premises searched and thousands of bottles of spirits confiscated. While poisoning from alcohol is common, the *Siberian Times* said the Irkutsk incident was "now the worst such case in modern Russian history". *BBC News, 19+21 Dec 2016.*

Dora Linda Nishihara, 69, an off-duty Sheriff's Deputy, died after her car fell into a 12ft (3.6m) sinkhole filled with water in San Antonio, Texas, on 4 December. The flow of water in the sinkhole was caused by a ruptured sewer line. A second vehicle also fell into the hole and two other people were hurt. The driver of the second vehicle was rescued by a witness, but Ms Nishihara's vehicle had flipped on to its roof and was completely submerged. *[AP] BBC News, Independent online, 6 Dec 2016.*

David Kervin, 51, was killed at 3.15am on 30 November in Indian Harbour Beach, Florida, when his motorised bicycle struck a turtle. Investigators spotted the injured turtle several feet away. "[Kervin] apparently suffered a head injury and was already deceased when we arrived," said a fire worker. "It appeared he hit the turtle." The small box turtle survived the crash with a minor crack in the bottom of its shell, and managed to crawl away. *Florida Today, 30 Nov 2016*.

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Rachel Dove, West Yorkshire.

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"I have been publishing my own niche website for circus critique. This work has led to recognition in my field, with work offers ranging from writing book reviews for scholarly journals to running master classes for young people. I have had two paid writing residencies at festivals this year and have been employed to write tweets. Payments total £2575, plus expenses for travel, tickets to events and payments in kind in the form of review copy books."

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